
The future of electronic entertainment issue#121
www.edge-online.com
EDGE®
XBOX I PLAYSTATION2 I GAMECUBE I PC I GBA I PLAYSTATION
It's ladies night: sexism, w
on the Web, and gaming
Previewed: Soul Calibur II, S
Chaos Legion, Starsky & H
Reviewed: Racing Evoluz
DoA Xtreme Beach Volley
Primal, The Mark of Kri, I
Game audio; Biffovision; Th
of Body Harvest; Pac-Man
The girl issue





Edge knows a few girls. Ladies that Namco's pill-popping, wakka-wakking yellow circle first lured into the male-dominated confines of the arcades some 23 years ago. Some would later only brave this intimidating environment again for the odd *Tetris* and *Super Puzzle Bobble* fix, but a few stayed the whole course. Before taking to the Game Boy, these game girls had grown up with Game & Watch, and the Spectrum, and the C64, the NES and Master System. Women who would subsequently lose themselves in *Super Mario 64*, *Tekken*, *Ocarina of Time*, *FFVII* and many others with the exact same enthusiasm as their male counterparts but with a resilience and dedication that far outclassed the latter – their gaming passion was maintained within a broader community that has relentlessly alienated (and occasionally exploited) female players.

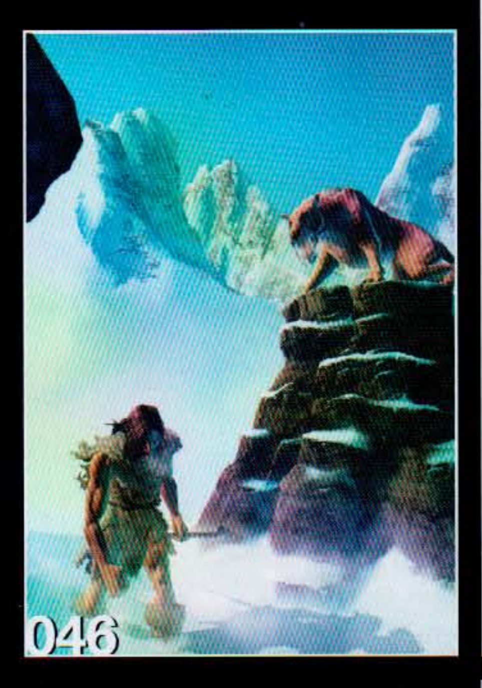
It's astonishing to think that in their haste to chase the male gameplaying demographic publishers have continuously estranged the dominant gender, creating a pastime that will be rightfully perceived by many women as intimidating and impenetrable – from game shop layout to game adverts, videogaming remains pathetically male-centric.

In many cases it's not a problem with the actual games. Titles with androgynous pull exist – they have always done so. Sure, certain genres will charm masculine traits more than others but **Edge**'s experience suggests superlative game mechanics do more for cross gender appeal than countless boardrooms full of marketing executives. Cynicism and game development rarely result in great gameplay, as the *Army Men* and *Barbie* franchises will attest. Yet boy- and girl-friendly electronic entertainment is perfectly attainable.

Working out why *The Sims* works and *SimCity* doesn't is not always an exact science. It's not even something **Edge** can explicate. As this themed issue should show, our concern is with the bigger picture: that the gaming community is and will continue to be worse off by ostracising girl gamers.



Features











Future Publishing Ltd is part of The Future Network plc.

The Future Network produces carefully targeted specialist magazines and websites for groups of people who share a passion. We aim to satisfy their passion by creating titles that offer superb value for money, trustworthy information, multiple ways to save time and money, and are a pleasure to read or visit. Today we publish more than 80 magazines and over 30 magazine websites and networks from offices in four countries. The company also licenses 32 of its titles resulting in over 60 local editions in a further 23 countries.

The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET)

Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244





Bath London **Milan** New York **Paris** San Francisco





ABC 31,063 (Audit Bureau of Circulation)

Editorial
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone 01225 442244
Fax 01225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
João Diniz-Sanches editor
Terry Stokes art editor
David McCarthy deputy editor
Mark Walbank associate editor
Scott Bradbury production editor
Darren Phillips deputy art editor
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Ste Curran editor-at-large

Contributors
Steve Bailey, Mr Biffo, Jon Jordan, Aleks Krotoski, John Leaver, Pete Lyle, Toshihiro Nagoshi, Simon Parkin, Nick Powell, Steven Poole, RedEye, Jim Rossignol, Keith Stuart

Production
Kirsty Bell senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager
Colin Polis commercial buyer

Circulation
Tom Shaw product manager
Regina Erak circulation manager

Advertising
Jayne Caple deputy advertising director
Simon Tapscott senior advertising manager
Claire Hawkins advertising manager
Darren Gratton deputy advertising manager
Andrew Church recruitment executive
Advertising phone 01225 442244

Publishing
James Binns publisher
Ian Miller group art editor
Tamara Longden promotions manager
Simon Wear international licensing director
David Maher-Roberts group publishing direc

Subscriptions & distribution
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 7BR
Telephone 01458 271184
Fax 01458 271146
Email games.subs@futurenet.co.uk

Distributed through the UK newstrade by **Sey Distribution**, 86 Newman Street, London W1F
Telephone 0207 907 6000
Having trouble finding **Edge**? **Tom Shaw** 012

Senior management
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive

the 'girls allowed' issue

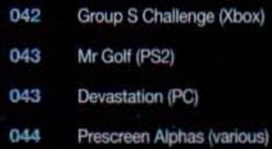








Prescreen













Regulars

Testscreen

Colin Morrison chief operating officer & MD, UK

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica Ultra Light, Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**

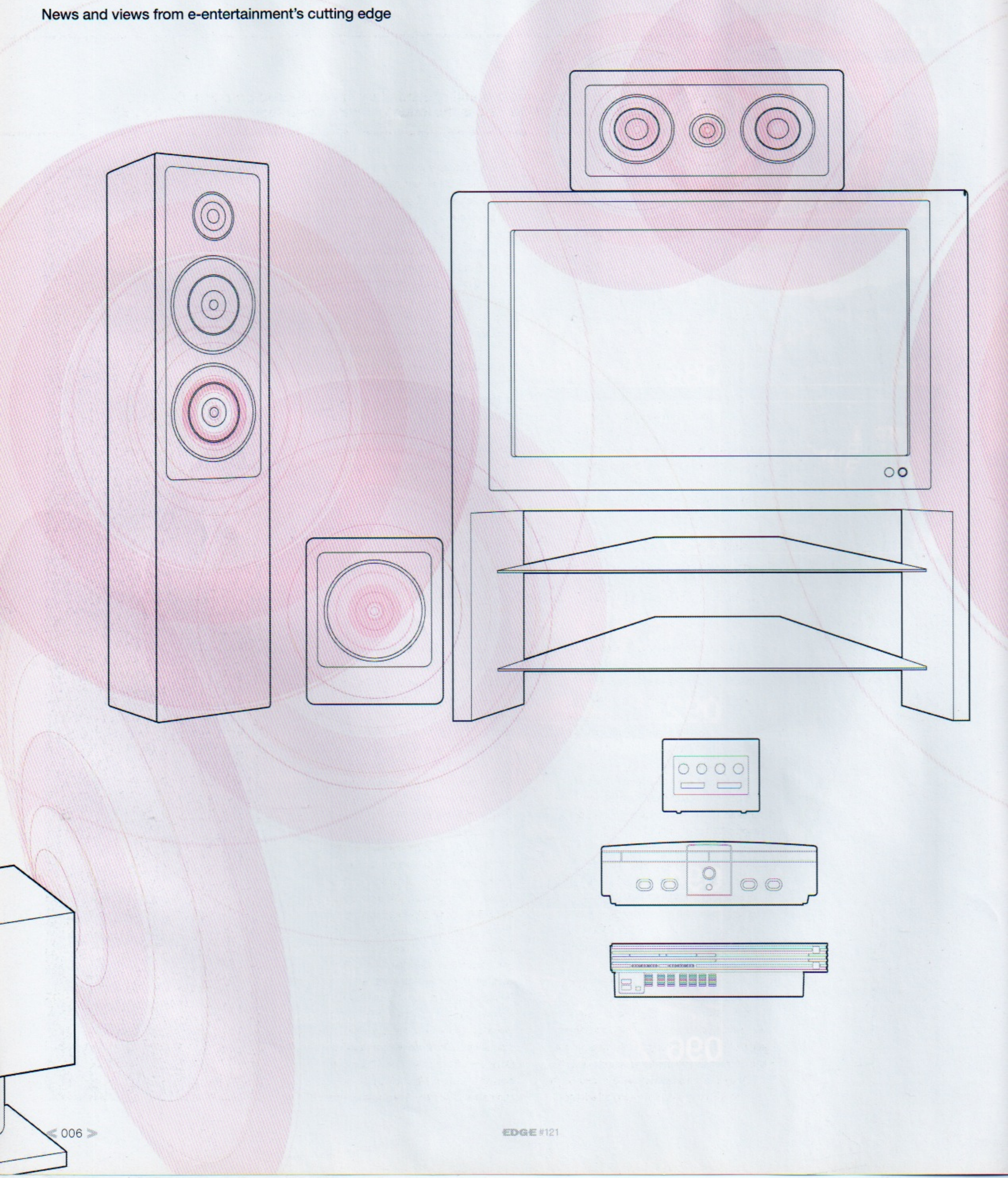
Printed in the UK by TPL Printers Ltd, Hartlebury, Worcs

Future Games: the first choice for gamers
Edge is brought to you by Future Publishing Ltd, the makers of PC Gamer, PlayStation2 Official Magazine-UK, The Official UK PlayStation Magazine, NGC, PSM2, MAX, GamesMaster

"How do you write women so well?"
"Easy. I think of a man, and I take away reason and accountability."

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Sounding Off

For many videogame developers audio is still of secondary importance to graphics. But with sales of consumer electronics on the rise, is the industry taking advantage of the sonic boom?

Although the past year hasn't been all sweetness and light for the games industry, it was, in general, a good year for consumer electronics, with momentum increasing in fields such as plasma screen televisions and home cinema systems attributed to the continued retail success of the DVD format. Sales of console and PC-centric surround sound systems are also on the rise. Logic3 for example sold over a quarter of a million units of its SoundStation2 in 18 months, while its successor the SoundStation3 sold 50,000 units in four months.

On the whole, companies are remaining guarded when it comes to revealing exactly how many units they have sold, but home computer audio systems now represent a sizeable chunk of PC hardware sales. More and more homes are playing host to 5.1 channel set-ups, and each of the current next-gen consoles is equipped in some way to take advantage of this sophisticated audio format. But is the videogame industry taking advantage of this penetration effectively?

Although the implementation of audio undoubtedly continues to play second fiddle to visuals by developers who remain committed to pushing the graphical envelope, there is significant justification for taking an upbeat attitude about the inroads being made by videogames that feature surround sound elements. However, approaches to sound design still differ dramatically.

The three main surround sound technologies are Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS. **Jack Buser**, Dolby's manager of game developer relations believes that surround sound is a firmly entrenched part of the expanding videogame lexicon. "Today, many of the top game media outlets feature in-depth technical evaluations of the audio features in reviewed games. Just as reviews talk about gouraud shading and bump mapping when referring to graphics, today's game mags and Websites talk about audio in terms of 5.1 channel soundtracks, obstructions and occlusions, and positional sound effects."

And while the specialist media is always quick to latch onto new technological advances and their virtues, consumers are also buying into the idea of games that support surround sound technology. Buser states that in the US seven out of ten of the best selling titles of the last two years have featured Dolby technology. "We estimate that nearly 30 per cent of hardcore gamers are playing their systems on a home cinema system with Dolby Digital. Now that we have reached critical mass, this number is sure to grow rapidly in the coming year."

Nevertheless the development community could be doing more to take advantage of this growing audience of gamers who are receptive to the sophisticated use of sound. **Rik Ede**, managing director of Gamesound Ltd, is a DTS consultant and considered as perhaps the leading authority on surround sound in games. He is credited as producing the world's first 5.1 game – Psygnosis' *Lander* some six years ago. "I think the only reason there aren't more games in surround is because on some formats you see the 5.1 logo and it's only in stereo," he argues. "The Xbox seems to suffer badly here in games, despite its hardware encoder. I'm amazed that this is the case, but even with that encoder onboard the music is on the whole in stereo. Sure, it does take time to mix in 5.1, but most guys try and get a 5.1 mix from stereo by adding reverb. What they should be doing is starting from scratch in 5.1 and making it compatible with stereo. That way you only have to mix it once."

This is the approach that Criterion takes, and the one that makes the most sense considering the fact that all three platforms support Pro Logic II, and Microsoft's Xbox's features an in-built 5.1-enabled Media Communications Processor. "We at Criterion believe in providing the best music content for whichever format you listen in," explains **Stephen Root**, the company's head of audio. "Mono or stereo formats are catered for using a standard mastered stereo mix; Pro Logic and Pro Logic II systems use an independent mix that we create in-house using a modified Dolby DP563 unit to encode a discrete 5.1 mix (with mastering) into a Pro Logic II compatible stereo file. Then for Xbox versions

"Nearly 30 per cent of hardcore gamers are playing their systems on a home cinema system with Dolby Digital"

Set-up

Set-up advice varies subtly from source to source, but there are fundamental principles to bear in mind when setting up a surround sound system (especially from scratch). Careful speaker placement is one, good quality speaker cable and interconnects (if applicable), another. The systems highlighted over the next pages are just a representation of what is available at the various price points selected. Once beyond the £500 mark you enter the realm of separates and the choice level (and to a certain extent, the quality) really opens up.

Main Speakers

The main left and right speakers should be high-performance models with power handling capable of accepting the maximum output of the amplifier in order to eliminate unwanted sound distortion. They should be equidistant from the optimum listening position in the room, ie where the listener is positioned. The distance of each speaker from the sides of the video monitor or projector should be equal too.

Centre Speaker

A crucial component of the set-up, this too should be of a certain performance standard. It should be placed as close to the video monitor as possible, ie on top or directly below, if storage system allows. In an ideal world the height of the centre unit should be in line with the audio components of the left and right front speakers, though this is often difficult. If the speaker is to sit on top of the video monitor it must be magnetically shielded to prevent interference.

Rear Speakers

These obviously should be placed behind the listener and either toed-in (angled slightly inwards) or firing directly towards the listening position. Their height should hover around that of the listener's ears once seated which, depending on the sofa, usually translates to around 120cm off the ground.

Subwoofer

As bass sounds are not highly directional, positioning of the subwoofer is not as critical as the positioning of the other speakers. However it is perhaps better positioned near the main speakers, firing towards a wall, as although it is designed to accentuate the sound from all channels, most audio information is outputted by the main pair of speakers.



Technology Standards

Games have toyed with multichannel soundtracks since the early '90s (*King Arthur's World* on the SNES is generally accepted as being the first console title to support Dolby Surround, a Pro Logic precursor featuring three-channel audio), while a few players, such as EA, have been consistent supporters of surround technology in their games. These days there are essentially three main technologies when it comes to surround sound in videogames:

Dolby Pro Logic II

Pro Logic II is capable of decoding a vast number of existing Dolby Surround signals into discrete 5-channel playback: two main left and right channels, a centre channel and two left and right channels at the rear (the original Pro Logic only utilised one rear channel). According to Buser, Pro Logic II can be utilised by both GameCube and PlayStation2 developers with almost zero hit to the main CPU's performance.



Dolby Digital

Independent multi-channel audio. Dolby Digital provides five full range audio channels and a separate channel called LFE (low frequency effect, or the infamous 0.1) for reproduction of bass signals, usually at frequencies from 20–120Hz. Xbox is currently the only console to provide realtime Dolby Digital decoding in its games although few titles are correctly mixed.



DTS (Digital Theater Systems)

DTS was developed to replace analogue film soundtracks with six-channel digital sound. The home theatre developed DTS technology delivers practically distortion-free audio across five channels and like Dolby Digital also features an LFE 0.1 channel. Realtime discrete 5.1 audio can be produced for the PlayStation2 in DTS via the DTSi PS2 SDK, with little performance loss.



Digitheatre ZXR

The Digitheatre ZXR is the perfect example of a low priced, yet modestly performing surround sound system. It is compatible with Dolby Digital, DTS and Pro Logic, making it a suitable partner for PC, Xbox and PS2 based gaming set-ups. The lack of Pro Logic II support – the dominant format used by the GameCube and commonly found on PlayStation2 makes it unsuitable for users with such a bias in their hardware choice.

In terms of performance the ZXR is best described as capable, offering a total output of 65W RMS – 8W to the front, centre and rear speakers and 25W to the subwoofer. Although compact, the speakers are solid and surprisingly weighty – no doubt accommodating sizeable driver magnets, and thankfully magnetic shielding makes it a suitable option for users with limited space, ensuring that there is no interference with video monitors.

The amplifier is housed inside the subwoofer, which offers a 5-inch driver and tuned front and rear bass ports. This is where the limitations of the system are exhibited as it is not uncommon to find systems with twin 12-inch or 15-inch drivers for home use. Still, for gamers with an Xbox or PC focus it offers decent value for money.

Input:
- Coaxial (Digital)
- Optical (Toslink)
- Stereo phono RCA

Power output:
- 65W RMS. Front, rear, centre: 8W; subwoofer 25W

Dimensions (mm):
- Subwoofer: 165 (w) x 250 (h) x 340 (d)
- Satellites: 85 (w) x 112 (h) x 98 (d)

Available:
- £128 exc. VAT
- www.pure-digital.com



we generate an interleaved music file using six discrete channels from the 5.1 mix."

It's this focused emphasis on 5.1-enabled audio that the industry needs to adopt across the board. But Ede's point that many developers fundamentally misunderstand the virtues of a 5.1 mix by adding reverb to a stereo channel would appear to suggest that this may be a struggle. Consequently he intends to use the forthcoming Game Developers Conference in San Jose to combat this misconception. He will be talking about producing realtime digital surround sound on the PlayStation2 utilising the DTSi PS2 SDK. This is the only realtime discrete 5.1 solution on PlayStation2, first used in the EA Sports and EA Sports Big titles *NHL 2002* and *SSX Tricky* with full 5.1 channel DTS and 4.0 channel DTS audio respectively. Significantly, it's an efficient technology, contradicting the established view that the PS2 is unable to produce realtime 5.1 without a substantial hit to the Emotion Engine and Graphics Synthesiser. Certainly the development expertise is out there, along with an ever-increasing audience and the appropriate hardware – it's just a case of introducing standard practices in execution.

"The surround effect can really immerse you in a game, especially on FPS games where you can now hear gunshots from all around"

Of course surround sound technology is not just limited to living room-based systems – the PC is also playing host to sophisticated surround sound technology. In fact, as is often the case, the platform is supporting new technologies that may well be introduced in the next generation of consoles. Perhaps the most impressive of these is nVidia's nForce architecture, which both encodes and decod audio into 5.1. **Micah Stroud**, product manager for nVidia sound products explains "nVidia SoundStorm, the audio component nForce, has the unique ability to take any au source, regardless of its origin or format, and create a fully compliant Dolby Digital 5.1 out stream for use on home theatre or high-end speaker systems."

Back catalogue

Since the Audio Processing Unit (APU) takes care of the entire process, there is no performance drop when using this feature. The most obvious advantage for such technology is the fact that a player's back catalogue of games can be newly appreciat via a 5.1 set-up. Indeed this might give gam an incentive to upgrade their audio systems providing a taster of what might be achieved games designed to take advantage of them from the outset.

Ede, who acted as audio technology consultant on Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto:*

Gamesurround Fortissimo III 7.1

7.1. It seems churlish to point it out, but it's one more than Creative's Audigy 2 Platinum offers. Of course this is all academic if the content is not there to take advantage of it. However gamers with existing five-, or six-speaker set-ups can hook those up as necessary and purchase additional satellites at their leisure as the Fortissimo is compatible with 2.1 right through to 7.1, making it an interesting consideration for future-facing PC owners.

It is compatible with Dolby Surround, Dolby Digital and Surround EX, while an optical output takes care of home theatre connectivity. Its Sensaura-based 3D positional audio supports DirectSound 3D, EAX, A3D, MacroFX, MultiDrive, ZoomFX, EnvironmentFX and Sound Blaster standards, for compatibility with a wide range of positional audio games.

External connectors:
Analog output connectors:
- front, rear, centre, LFE, 7th and 8th channel
- Headphone out
- Line in
- Mic in
- MIDI / Joystick port
- Optical SPDIF out

Internal connectors:
- CD-in 1
- CD-in 2
- Aux in
- SPDIF in

Available:
- £50
- www.hercules-uk.com

Vice City cites the game as a prime example of a title enhanced by surround sound. "Analogue technology was out as they wanted to steer multiple sounds at the same time. I showed them DTSi stuff and within a few days it was up and running. Jump on a motorbike and feel the sense of immersion; guys chasing you with baseball bats that you can't see, but you can hear in the surrounds."

Surround sound

Immersion is, of course, the key word – the best videogames are those that manage to completely envelop a player in a fully coherent and stable gameworld, and sound is a powerful tool in achieving this. **Brian Faller**, marketing and PR manager for Spectravideo, creators of the SoundStation 5.1 agrees. "The surround effect can really immerse you in a game, especially on FPS games where you can now hear gunshots from all around. Also *Colin McRae Rally* shows what surround sound can do, hearing every crash, door slam and tyre noise as if you were in the car."

But sound does not just affect a listener through what is heard but also through what is felt. A lot of the impact of blockbuster films at the cinema is derived from the powerful bass generated by the sound system. Up until the inroads of home theatre systems, this level of feedback was a phenomenon reserved for the cinema – a fact reflected by the development of rumble technology in joypads and other peripherals. While the two technologies can and

Sony HTK25 Ultra Compact Designer Home Theatre Kit

Multiformat owners with a little extra money budgeted for a surround sound system are advised to demo a system such as Sony's HTK25. It supports Dolby Digital, DTS and both Pro Logic and Pro Logic II enamouring itself with the GameCube fraternity. Another obvious bonus over the Digitheatre ZXR is the inclusion of an extra Optical SPDIF Toslink input, meaning that both a PlayStation2 and Xbox can be linked simultaneously.

Power output is generous with the satellite speakers handling 40W RMS, while the subwoofer handles 70W. All units are magnetically shielded for trouble free positioning. Users with a penchant for system coordination, loathe to utilise their games machine as a DVD player may be interested to hear of the complimentary Sony DVPF25 DVD player, available separately.

The HTK25 features a range of Digital Cinema Sound modes for cinema-like sound playback, and a compliment of other effect modes including concert, jazz and game.

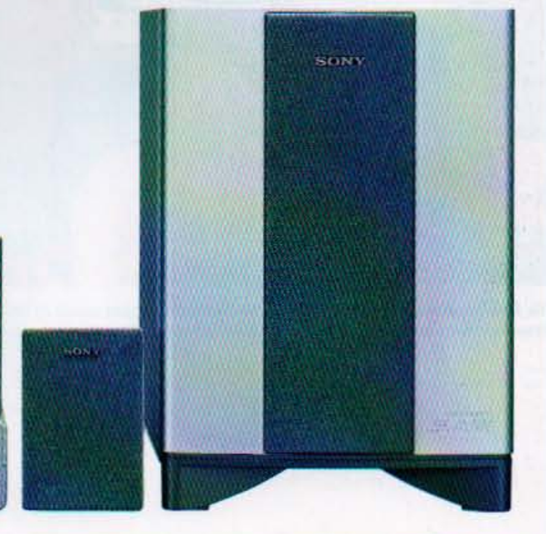
Such modes are becoming increasingly prevalent in surround sound decoders and utilise Dolby and DTS output alongside acoustic data measured in all manner of venues, for example cinemas, rock concerts and jazz clubs to recreate real-life acoustic conditions as closely as possible in user's homes.

Inputs:
- Coaxial (Digital)
- Optical (Toslink) x2
- Stereo phono RCA x2

Power output:
- Front, rear, centre: 40W RMS;
- subwoofer 70W RMS

Dimensions (mm):
- Subwoofer: 224 (w) x 318.5 (h) x 334 (d)
- Satellites: 77 (w) x 115 (h) x 89 (d)

Available:
- £380
- www.sony.co.uk



Audigy 2 Platinum Soundcard and Inspire 6.1 6700 speakers



Two complementary products from Creative enable a range of surround sound-related functionality for PC owners. The Audigy 2 Platinum delivers DVD-Audio media at the enhanced 24bit/192Khz quality. It also boasts 6.1 surround sound from Dolby Digital EX films such as 'Gladiator' and of course EAX and DirectSound 3D videogames.

The extra rear channel is utilised by DirectSound 3D and EAX compatible games to provide positional audio cues pertaining to action that takes place behind the player.

The Inspire 6.1 6700 delivers 82W RMS – five satellites delivering 8W RMS, a 20W RMS centre speaker and a 22W RMS subwoofer. Owners of a 5.1 sound card will be interested to hear that if the Creative multi-speaker surround function is enabled a pseudo 6.1 field is created to utilise the set's extra channel.



Onboard Connectors
- Line level out (front/rear/centre/ subwoofer/rear centre)
- Digital Out for 5.1 support
- Line in
- Mic in
- SB1394/FireWire port
- Telephone Answering device in
- Analog/Digital CD Audio in
- MIDI/Joystick port

Front Panel Connectors:
- Headphone Out (1/4" Jack) with volume control
- Line In
- Microphone In
- MIDI In
- MIDI Out
- Optical SPDIF In and Out
- Coaxial SPDIF In and Out
- Stereo Aux In
- SB1394 port
- Infra-red receiver

Available:
- Audigy 2 Platinum Soundcard: £153 exc. VAT
- Inspire 6.1 6700 speakers: £85 exc. VAT
- http://uk.europe.creative.com



Rik Ede, now managing director of Gamesound, spent years at Dolby working with developers to ensure the correct implementation of multi-channel sound in their games

should co-exist, for example, in recreating the kick back of an FPS weapon, in the past, rumble technology has largely been used as a replacement for a meaty dose of low frequency bass. ASCII's Trance Vibrator pack for the PlayStation2 release of *Rez* added powerful vibration feedback because Tetsuya Mizuguchi felt that home audio systems lacked necessary sonic clout, for example, but in the future such feedback could be made obsolete by developers with an ear for bass audio cues.

"One example would be the use of the subwoofer as a hint," explains Ede. "Imagine being stuck in a room and there's no way out. You pace up and down and there is a subtle difference in the sound on the floor when you walk, indicated by a rumble in sub. Jump up and down in that area and a trap door falls through." It's hardly a revolutionary idea, but a more graceful cue than those previously used in videogames, such as *Majora's Mask*, which utilised the Rumble Pack to alert a player of secret items, or Dreamcast's *Skies of Arcadia* which used a beeping VMU.

No limits

Aaron Marks is a game composer, sound designer, author of 'The Complete Guide to Game Audio', and audio features contributor for Music4Games.net. He feels that this sort o audio feedback is the tip of the iceberg as far as surround sound's potential is concerned,

"We're in the infancy of utilising surround. With this learning curve comes a soundscape which will totally immerse the game player"

"The sky is the limit. There are some incredibly talented people in our industry who will come up with these innovations, most of which probably haven't even been thought of yet. Right now, we're in the infancy of utilising surround to its fullest. With this learning curve comes an effective soundscape which will totally immerse the game player."

But developments in technology that allov

audio environments to be refined will have to run hand in hand with other, equally immersive, technologies. As Marks observes, "There may be an eventual turn to voice recognition and AI which responds accordingly. This will affect, of course, how the audio is presented in a game. There can't be a cacophony of music, sound effects, dialogue, voice commands, etc, blasting a player's ears. It will be interesting to see how this is addressed. I also foresee massive improvements on the interactive and adaptive audio fronts. Having the audio change and adapt to the player's decisions and movements is the latest trend in game audio improvement. While these aren't necessarily tied to the success of surround sound, they will drive the whole innovation process to that next level."

Adaptive soundtracks certainly have the potential to build upon the immersive qualities of surround sound. Titles such as Sonic Team's *NiGHTS* have flirted with the medium, and Xbox's DirectSound API makes such a feature relatively easy to implement, but for an industry getting to grips with new audio technology a renaissance in the near future seems unlikely.

Road to obsolescence

In fact the future of the whole medium is hard to predict. Like the PC hardware market, many innovations are dreamt up, developed, launched and are seemingly on the road to obsolescence before consumers are up to speed with current tech. One thing is certain, to Ede at least: the future's not analogue. 5.1 is rapidly emerging as a viable and worthy standard, with the increasing availability of surround sound set-ups that combine performance with affordability. 6.1 is also gaining in popularity. Ede's studio for example runs at 24bit 96Khz in DTS 6.1 ES. "I can't see a reason for adding any more speakers. The only ones missing are above and below, but my research into this found that if a speaker isn't directly above your head, then it's either in front or behind, so pretty pointless."

Still, just to cause a little confusion, because at times it seems that's what new technology should do, greater numbers of speakers are being introduced into the mix, as Marks points out, "Equipment manufacturers are already a step ahead of game developers. While the game industry learns the intricacies of present surround sound formats like Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS and Neo, these companies are already moving to the next level with 6.1, 7.1 and 8.1 channel playback systems. At this rate, we will eventually have multiple speaker arrays surrounding the listener from all sides. The logistics of something like that would need to be overcome, like where to put all those speakers..."

Indeed for many **Edge** readers this is perhaps the biggest obstacle to 'the ultimate set-up'. Or as Ede puts it, "Yeah, like my wife is gonna let me stick a huge speaker on the ceiling."

Xbox Advanced Scart Pack

While Nintendo is content for GameCube developers to utilise the processor-friendly Pro Logic II audio option via the stereo RCA leads found on standard AV cables, both the PlayStation2 and Xbox are capable of digital output for Dolby Digital and DTS signals. While the PS2 offers a built-in optical port, the Xbox does not – a strange omission for a machine with built in 5.1 hardware encoder. However the purchase of the Advanced Scart Pack remedies this providing both Digital Coaxial and Optical Toslink outputs.

The fact that the cable is RGB compliant means that it is the AV lead best suited for gamers wishing to fully explore the Xbox's gamut of audio/visual capabilities. A possible reason for the occlusion of digital audio outs on the Xbox hardware is because successful implementation requires users to define the compatibility of their decoder with Dolby Digital and DTS technologies, similar to how users must specify PAL50 and PAL60 compatibility for video output to televisions.

For laypeople such a process may cause confusion, but customers of the Advanced Scart Pack, in theory at least, are more likely to be up to aware of such technologies.

Available:
£20 All good retailers



Sound games

A selection of superior game audio to be found in recent console releases:

Burnout 2: Point of Impact (Pro Logic II)
Colin McRae Rally 3 (Dolby Digital 5.1)
GTA: Vice City (DTS)
Halo: Combat Evolved (Dolby Digital 5.1))
Legend of Zelda: Winds of Takuto (Pro Logic II)
Medal of Honor Frontline (Pro Logic II)
Metroid Prime (Pro Logic II)
Star Wars Rogue Leader (Pro Logic II)
Super Mario Sunshine (Pro Logic II)
TOCA Race Driver (Pro Logic II)







Three of the better examples of game audio implementation **Edge** has come across in recent times (from top): *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *MoH Frontline* and *Winds of Takuto*

Microsoft appoints Sega veteran to Xbox operations

Peter Moore appointed to Microsoft's Home and Entertainment division as Sandy Duncan announces intention to step down

Microsoft has scored a significant coup by signing up Peter Moore, the former president and chief operating officer of Sega of America to its Xbox operation. Having overseen the disproportionate success of the Dreamcast in the domestic US market, Moore will be able to bring some much needed experience of next-generation console battles to his new position.

That position will be the newly created role of corporate vice president of retail sales and marketing, and will see him take over the stewardship of the company's Home and Entertainment division, including Xbox operations in Europe and Japan and PC games. He will report to **Robbie Bach**, who was quick to praise Moore's track record, "Peter has an outstanding track record of success in the consumer market and videogame industries. In addition, we look forward to utilising his deep knowledge of foreign markets to continue to grow our retail business in Europe and Japan. In Europe, where we have made enormous progress, particularly with the Xbox business gaining the number two position there, Peter will be working to maintain and accelerate that good standing. In Japan, we expect that he will contribute greatly to the work already being done there to advance the business."

Moore's lore

With over 20 years of management experience, including a stint at Reebok, Moore was responsible for significant domestic US success, most notably with the Dreamcast and the US-based sports game development arm. Nevertheless, relations with Sega's Japanese HQ never went entirely smoothly, and there were several occasions when he was apparently surprised by announcements made by the parent company. It will be interesting to see, though, how successfully he will be able to transfer his expertise in the US videogame market to Europe and Japan – two very different cultural propositions.





Sandy Duncan will be known to most **Edge** readers thanks to his involvement with the Xbox launch, though his career at Microsoft spanned 17 years. Although his presence will likely be missed, the addition of Peter Moore to Microsoft's Xbox operations bodes well

Meanwhile, more management changes will see the likeable Sandy Duncan step down from the company's European arm after 17 years – including the last three launching the Xbox in Europe. His role will be assumed by Eduardo Rosini, who will report to Moore, and who has worked on Xbox since its inception.

Confusion over second place in console war

Microsoft and Nintendo argue over figures, but there's no confusion over first place as PlayStation2 continues to dominate



As Sony announced that global PlayStation2 shipments have reached 50m units, Microsoft and Nintendo got caught up in an embarrassing tussle over who has claimed second spot in the European bout of the current console war. While Microsoft was quoting research agencies Chart-Track and GfK to support its claim that the Xbox has taken the number two spot in Europe, Nintendo remained adamant that it had figures to show that the opposite was the case.

Who's number two?

While Microsoft was claiming that the Xbox is "the fastest growing debut console ever," Nintendo's **Shelley Friend** was reassuring trade magazine 'MCV' that GameCube had come out on top: "As far as we're concerned, we're still number two in Europe. We had sold 1.5 million units across Europe up until Christmas, and our records show this puts us in the second spot. As there is no research body that currently monitors sales European-wide, it really is hard to gauge sales exactly."

Of course it's impossible to say who's bluffing, but neither company has exactly scored a PR coup with the incident. In any case, it's clear that all three major console manufacturers continue to look forward to the next generation of consoles. In what's becoming a regular feature of Frontend, **Edge** can repeat several rumours that have reached our ears including the launch of a revised version of Nintendo's GameCube before the end of the year and a new Panasonic Q which will incorporate a hard drive to allow video recording.

The new GameCube is thought to be smaller and cheaper, and may even feature DVD playback. Microsoft is also expected to launch a smaller, cheaper version of Xbox in Japan towards the end of the year, and this Xbox may also support video recording via its hard drive.

Meanwhile, Sony intends to cut the PlayStation2 price towards the end of the year in a bid to reposition it in anticipation of a potential successor which is currently expected to debut in March 2005, and Nintendo president Satoru Iwata announced that the next-generation GameCube successor is planned for 2005 or 2006.

Sega shows off new F-Zero footage

Sega's annual arcade get-together offers little novelty but a few tantalising glimpses of what to expect from AOU





Given Sega's dominance over the coin-op market, its annual arcade show was a bit of a disappointment. Here's to AOU then

Once again Sega celebrated the new year by holding its own private arcade show on January 17. The event took place at the Pio convention centre near the company's HQ in Ota-ku, south east of Tokyo, but offered little in the way of surprises. Unfortunately, as in previous years and despite Sega's predominance of the coin-op sector, there simply wasn't much to see.

One of the major attractions was Sega-AM2's eagerly awaited *Virtua Cop 3*, which was enthusiastically received by the majority of attendees. Hitmaker was also on hand to present the arcade version of *Crazy Taxi 3*, running on the Chihiro board. Although the title is, of course, already available to Xbox owners, the viability of a coin-op version seems assured by the low penetration of Microsoft's console in Japan and the historical arcade success of the series. And though it's looking similar to the consumer version of the title, it has been tweaked to enhance its suitability for the arcades.

The other major title on show was *F-Zero*, which was displayed by means of new video footage, and though there was no playable version on the show floor, it's currently looking highly promising. The full title is expected to be finished in time for the forthcoming AOU conference, which takes place in February. It's unlikely that the game cabinet will be completed by then if Toshihiro Nagoshi gets his way; but it's not yet clear whether Sega will sanction his dream of recreating the entire cockpit and hull of an *F-Zero* car.

But while the show was relatively disappointing in terms of new titles, it did offer some hope for the AOU conference. Although Amusement Vision is preoccupied with *F-Zero* for the coin-op and home console, several big titles are expected to be announced by Sega-AM2, Hitmaker and possibly Sega Rosso. It's not yet clear whether *OutRun 2* will be present in playable form, but expect a full report next issue.

ATEI offers little cheer for coin-op sector

ATEI offers handful of highlights, but no convincing killer app to woo punters back into the arcades

Cheap suits were once again the order of the day at London's Earls Court at the end of the January, as it hosted the 59th annual Amusement Trades Exhibition International (ATEI). As always, the show contained a healthy amount of gambling machinery, pool tables and lots of other stuff that **Edge** wasn't really interested in, but it also found room for the handful of videogame publishers still active in the coin-op sector to show off their wares. The show did little to stem the impression given in recent years that the coin-op sector is heading towards moribundity, but there were a handful of entertaining titles on display.

Unsurprisingly, Konami, Namco and Sega were the biggest names on the block, and the trend for augmenting arcade titles with memory cards and sophisticated cabinet technology continued. Perhaps the most notable development was the introduction of cash prizes to standard coin-op titles; Konami's *Silent Scope Fortune Hunter*, for example, allows players to win (small) cash prizes by shooting icons, while Sega's *Club Kart Prize* also featured screens littered with 2p icons.

Show highlights

Other highlights included Namco's *Taiko No Tatsujin*, complete with drum peripheral, and Gaelco's *Tokyo Cop: Special Police Reinforcement*, complete with hydraulically motivated cabinet and featuring four Tokyo districts to race through. Lightgun games on show included Konami's *Warzaid*, which offers some frenetic fourplayer action, as well as Konami's motion-sensing technology and a version of the telescopic lens system employed by *Silent Scope*. And motion-sensing technology was also on display in the shape of *Mocap Golf*, which incorporated two monitors on the floor and a virtual club – it'll be interesting to see if it makes the transition to PlayStation2.



ATEI was once again characterised by outlandish cabinets and cheap suits, but offered little that was genuinely new

Nevertheless, there were few surprises on offer here. Titles such as *Initial D*, *The House of the Dead III* and *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* from Sega, or Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer: The Arcade* have all been seen before at trade shows. There is, after all, barely a trickle of titles being developed; a fact reflected by ATEI.

CUTTINGS



Warcraft expansion lined up

Blizzard has announced that *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* (reviewed in **E**114) is to receive an expansion. *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* will debut in the summer, and will introduce a new chapter to the narrative outlined in the original game. The expansion will also present several new features, including a new Hero for each race, new units, new tilesets, various neutral buildings and expanded multiplayer options and maps. Blizzard has also licensed the *Warcraft* game universe for a pen and paper RPG; the 'Dungeons & Dragons Warcraft Role-Playing Game' is to be published later this year by Swords & Sorcery Studios in conjunction with Wizards of the Coast.

Sony announces Telewest partnership

In an unsurprising move, Sony and Telewest have consummated their relationship by signing a partnership deal that will see the cable company working with Sony to develop a network for PlayStation2. The agreement will result in the formation of a new company, to be headed by former broadband chief David Docherty. Following Kunitake Ando's keynote speech at the Consumer Electronics Show, during which the Sony president highlighted the eventual role that PlayStation2 is intended to play in streaming media around the home, Docherty confirmed that the new network will eventually allow the console to host downloadable content such as pay-per-view films. The service will launch later this year in competition with Xbox Live.

Phantom console announced

In what is either an obvious and poorly designed hoax or another unlikely bid to take on the might of the big three console manufacturers, a Website has appeared that claims to represent the manufacturer of a new broadband-enabled console called 'The Phantom'. Infinium Labs is apparently launching the appropriately monikered console by the end of this year, and claims to be "a leader in the converging Internet, digital entertainment and consumer electronics markets." If nothing else, it arguably offers a useful test of the videogame industry's credulity in advance of Ain't It Cool's proposed videogame Website. See infiniumlabs.com for more (probably spurious) information.

Financial woes continue to beset videogame sector

Yet more videogame publishers have fallen victim to increased competition, with UK publisher Rage being forced to close its doors

Following last issue's report about the parlous state of the videogame industry, further bad news has emerged in the wake of several end of year financial announcements from publishers and developers. In spite of record sales figures, it would seem that more and more companies are becoming victims of increased competition in the videogame sector, with UK-based publishers Rage and Empire and US company Acclaim especially prominent among the list of high-profile casualties.



The receivers are currently trying to find possible buyers for titles like *Lamborghini*

Of these, Rage was undoubtedly the hardest hit, being forced to enter into bankruptcy when its banking facilities were withdrawn by the Bank of Scotland. Despite the critical acclaim that greeted *Rocky*, and the promise shown by properties such as *Lamborghini* and *Andy McNab: Team SAS*, the company went into receivership on January 15 and ceased operations shortly afterwards, closing its four studios and making all but 17 of its 162-strong workforce redundant. The company is still looking into finding buyers for its various properties. In comparison, Empire's woes were less serious, but nevertheless poor fourth-quarter sales resulted in the announcement of a profit warning that hit the company's share price.

Acclaim is also suffering, having announced the resignation of Edmond Sanctis, its president and chief operating officer, and making significant redundancies. In a bid to reduce operating expenses by 35 per cent, the company is to lay off one third of its administrative staff due to disappointing sales in 2002, with titles such as *BMX XXX* and *Turok* suffering in spite of high-profile marketing campaigns.

And it's not just thirdparty publishers; shares in Nintendo have also suffered from EA's decision to cut its forecasts for US GameCube sales. EA itself, meanwhile, continues to go from strength to strength, announcing quarterly revenues of $1.23bn (£750m) showing an increase of 48 per cent compared to the same time last year. Nevertheless, there may yet be jobs lost at the company due to the consolidation of its Irvine and Las Vegas studios into a major game development facility in Los Angeles.

In related news, the ongoing troubles of Vivendi Universal have prompted renewed speculation that Microsoft is lining up as a potential buyer. The division's most lucrative properties are probably Blizzard Entertainment's *Diablo* and *Warcraft*, which have attracted a bid from Microsoft, but Electronic Arts is also thought to be interested in acquiring the unit.





Titles like *Rocky* did little to offset Rage's debts, while shock tactics failed to raise the retail profile of titles such as *BMX XXX*

International 3D Awards announces entry categories

The judging panel and entry categories have been announced for the annual 3D design awards to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark

The 3D Awards Committee

The awards will be judged by the following panel:
Eric Armstrong, Sony Pictures Imageworks
Markus Manninen, Framestore CFC
Mike Milne, Framestore CFC
Alex Morris, Hayes Davidson
Shelley Page, DreamWorks
Alex Alvarez, Gnomon School of VFX
Jason Schleifer, Weta Digital
Tommy Strand, Funcom
Knut Ramstad, Telenor Expo
Jimmy Hassel, 3D Festival
Dan Platt, Solid Image Arts
Leonard Teo, CGNetworks
Victor Navone, Pixar Animation Studios
Herman Bailey, Christian Bjorn Design
Dr Mark Snoswell, Snoswell Design

This May will see The International 3D Awards take place at the annual 3D Festival in Copenhagen, Denmark. The event is aimed at meeting the digital design industry's need for a global set of awards covering every sector, from high-end animation and digital effects, to independent artists and students, and it claims to be the world's largest meeting-place for professional 3D animators and digital effects artists. The games industry will also be given its own berth at the festival in the shape of the Game Developers World conference.



The organiser of this year's 3D Awards has just announced categories and jury

In addition to Game Developers World, the 3D Festival itself is intended to be a celebration of 3D creativity, held over a four-day period and comprising two additional conferences. The 3D Festival Conference caters for high-end 3D animation and digital effects while the Architectural Visualisation Conference is the only one of its kind. And although held in Scandinavia, the 3D Awards are intended to be a global, industry-wide event.

Event organisers recently announced the panellists that will make up the jury for the awards, winners of which will each receive a hand-crafted and prestigious Digital Hero trophy. Entries are currently being accepted; for more information visit the event Website (www.3dawards.org).

Entry and Categories

The categories for the 3D Awards 2003 are as follows:
Feature Film Visual Effects
Television Visual Effects
Commercials
Music Videos
Short Films
Logos and Idents
Independent Animations
Game Visual Arts
Game Cinematics (non-interactive)
Technological Innovation
Industrial Design
Architectural Visualisation (Animation)
Architectural Visualisation (Still)
Student 3D Animation
3D Art (still)

Zool finally comes to PlayStation2

Sony unveils the latest part of its Third Place marketing campaign with sponsorship of short film campaign

As part of its ongoing ambition to target the PlayStation2 brand at style cognoscenti, Sony has announced the latest strands in its Third Place marketing campaign. The first of these, PlayStation2 Project Zool, is the latest part of Sony's underground marketing campaign for the console, and is dedicated to "the emotions of passion, honesty and self identity."

The project has already seen the creation of five short films that illustrate "ordinary people with extraordinary passions," which were shown during the Streets' recent UK tour, and which will eventually form part of an exhibition. The subjects of the films range from a Welsh-language rapper (helpfully subtitled for non-Welsh speakers) to a female skateboarder, but the aim is to expand the range of subjects by inviting members of the public to submit film ideas. Information about submitting a film idea can be found at www.zooluk.com/

Meanwhile, Sony has also announced a partnership with London radio station Xfm. The deal will see a post-club show taking place between 12–1am on Sundays. Called, appropriately, The Third Place, it will be produced by Xfm's Eddy Temple Morris.



Urban cart racing and vernacular rhyming are just two of the subjects of Project Zool film shorts. Anybody with their own ideas for films should check out the Website

Recently Reviewed

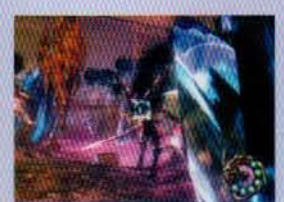
Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	GBA	Nintendo	In-house	9
MotoGP: URT (Xbox Live)	Xbox	THQ	Climax Motorsports	8
Mr Driller Drill Land	GC	Namco	In-house	8
O.TO.GI	Xbox	From Software	In-house	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon (Xbox Live)	Xbox	Ubi Soft	Red Storm Entertainment	8
Ape Escape 2	PS2	SCEE	In-house (SCEI)	7
Crimson Sea	Xbox	Koei	In-house	7
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Xbox	Sega	Smilebit	7
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	GBA	THQ	Realism Studios	6
Unreal Championship (Xbox Live)	Xbox	Infogrames	Digital Extremes/Epic Games	6
MechAssault (Xbox Live)	Xbox	Microsoft	Day 1 Studios	5
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Xbox, PS2, GC	Midway	In-house	4
The Revenge of Shinobi	GBA	THQ	3d6	3
Space Raiders	PS2, GC	Taito	In-house	2


TLoZ: A Link to the Past


MotoGP: URT (Xbox Live)


Mr Driller Drill Land


O.TO.GI

CUTTINGS



Edge presents Retro – 'The making of...' special

After the success of **Edge presents Retro**, **Edge** is to bring out another special in the **Retro** series. 'The making of...' special is currently available from a limited selection of newsagents, with a cover price of £5. It is also available by phoning 0870 4448466, but it does not form part of the **Edge** subscription package.

The magazine collects 33 'The making of...' articles, presenting them in chronological order and accompanying them with original screenshots and concept artwork. In addition to making these articles available in a single publication, the magazine also includes several that have been specially commissioned (*Speedball 2*, *Sid Meier's Civilization*, *Centipede*, *Battlezone* and *Dragon's Lair*).

Blitz relaunches careers Website

UK developer Blitz Games has relaunched its careers Website GameON (www.BlitzGames.com/GameON). Originally launched in 1999, the site has been given a facelift in the shape of new content and a redesigned interface in a bid to increase its effectiveness at providing a comprehensive source of advice for anyone interested in joining the videogame industry. Existing sections covering programming and art have consequently been supplemented with detailed sections relating to audio, QA and script-writing roles, as well as information about peripheral roles including PR & marketing, IT support, journalism and retail.

Jumbled Gamestar up Sky gets

Kuju Entertainment has launched the first in a series of titles over Sky Gamestar, Sky digital's interactive TV games portal. The game allows three players to compete head-to-head, racing against the clock to form groups of similar-shaped objects to rid them from the screen. The game is set to join Gamestar's growing portfolio of simple iTV games such as *Tomb Raider* and *Space Invaders*. Players access Jumble by pressing red while tuned to a Sky channel or the Interactive button on their Sky remote control, and it's available on a pay-to-play basis at 50p for unlimited games per gaming session.

The next step for physics

www.havok.com

Improving the believability of game characters is the goal for the latest version of Havok's physics engine

Physics in practice

Due to be launched at GDC, Havok 2.0 is currently being used by ten beta partners, all of which are described as being "high-profile developers." One announced partner for the new technology, though, is Finnish studio Remedy, which is using the middleware in its sequel to *Max Payne*. "We've achieved a high degree of customisation in a short timeframe while implementing widespread collision detection and character controllers for the game," says lead technology programmer, **Markus Stein**. "We're confident Havok will save us lots of time and money further down the road. So far we are only scratching its surface." Another potentially triple-A game relying on Havok for its dynamics is Blizzard's *StarCraft: Ghost*. Under development for all three consoles, the game's coding duties are headed by San Raphael studio Nihilistic. Other long-term Havok clients include Ion Storm, (using it for *Deus Ex Invisible War* and *Thief III*), Activision and Valve.



One high-profile game using Havok's physics middleware is Blizzard's *StarCraft: Ghost*. Others include the *Deus Ex* and *Max Payne* sequels

Physics middleware made its initial impact not by providing developers with a set of new features but because it offered existing features cheaper and faster. The result was that the first wave of titles enabled by the technology were concentrated within realistic genres such as vehicle-based racers.

"With a car game, the vehicle dynamics are a core part of the gameplay, so developers were happy to spend processing resources simulating high-fidelity dynamics," says Havok's chief technical officer, **Steve Collins**, explaining the company's early success. But, "Now, 70 per cent of top ten games are about characters, few are hardcore vehicle simulations."

Which is why vendors such as the Dublin-based Havok and its Oxford-based competitor MathEngine have branched out to introducing physics into less rigidly-defined areas, particularly character animation. However, the problem for both companies has been getting the technology fast enough for developers to use without compromising their games' core performance.

"We want to enable developers to have characters moving around, interacting with the environment, with a proper physical representation running beneath it all," says Collins. "Gamers aren't happy seeing characters sliding along with their shoulder or arm embedded in the wall anymore. It removes the illusion of reality, and that's the sort of thing high-resolution physics can stop."

In its simplest application, the middleware allows animations to be generated in realtime purely by modelling the physical interactions of in-game objects and characters.





A traditional implementation of in-game physics is rigid-body dynamics, which crashes hard objects such as a car into pre-fragmented objects such as a brick wall. The results are spectacular but scenarios are often limited to certain game genres

At present, animations are either created using motion capture, which is expensive, or keyframed individually by an artist, which is time-consuming. Applying real dynamics to so-called ragdoll models does away with this, albeit at the expense of having to calculate the motion in realtime; cue the middleware companies' fundamental problem.

"Character dynamics is a different field to rigid-body dynamics," Collins agrees. "In order for developers to be able to use it, the physical behaviours we enable have to be almost free in processing terms." Enabling this has involved a complete re-engineering of Havok's core physics engine.

"When you start off building a physics engine, you concentrate on the maths and tend to end up with something which is too processor expensive," Collins says. "What our experience over the past couple of years has demonstrated is what's of real importance, what shortcuts can be made and how to structure what's left so it's optimised to whatever architecture it's running on."

Collins boasts that overall performance has improved by an order of magnitude, with Havok 2.0 able to run the dynamics of up to ten ragdolls, whereas Havok 1.0 struggled with just one at a time. This, he believes, will take physics middleware to the next level – giving developers new features to play with and allowing them to create higher-quality games, fastest and cheaper than before.

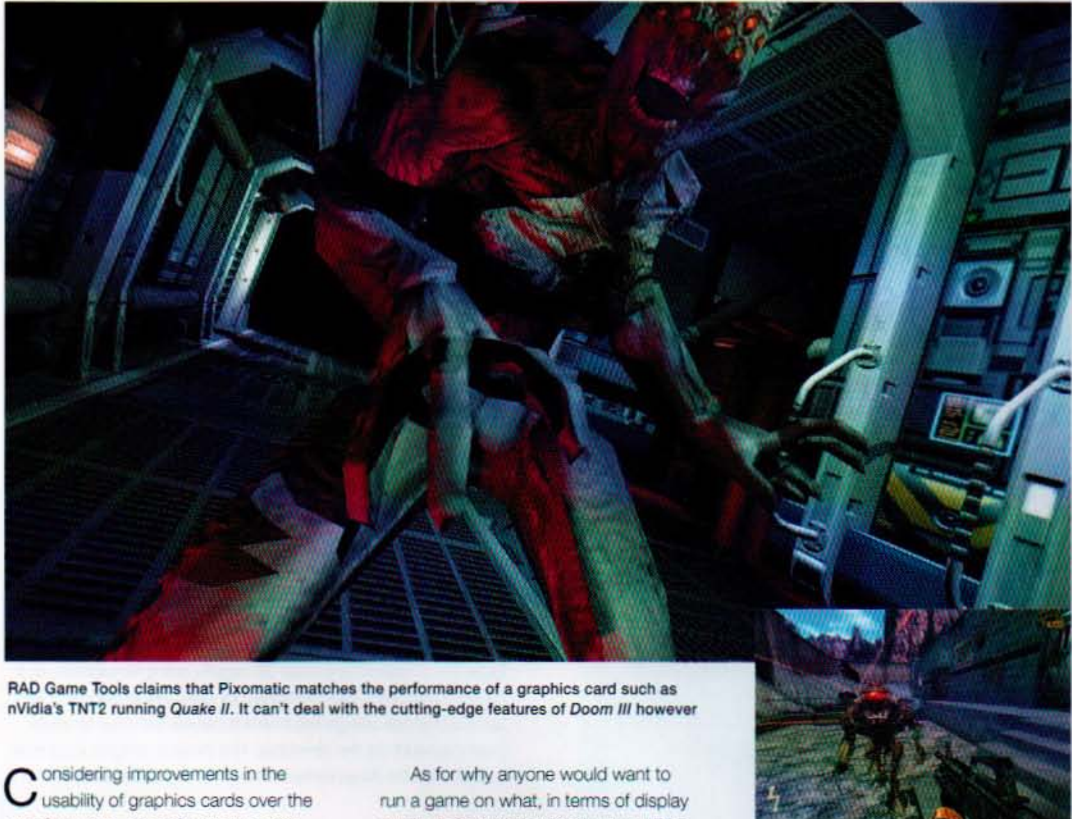




The re-engineering of the core physics engine means that Havok 2.0 is capable of handling interactions between the environment and up to ten ragdoll models in realtime

Return of the CPU

RAD Game Tools reckons power without control is nothing, which is why it has high hopes for Pixomatic, its optimised software renderer



RAD Game Tools claims that Pixomatic matches the performance of a graphics card such as nVidia's TNT2 running *Quake II*. It can't deal with the cutting-edge features of *Doom III* however

Considering improvements in the usability of graphics cards over the past few years, the software rasteriser would appear to be an increasingly anachronistic piece of PC technology. Not so, says US tools company RAD Game Tools.

Best known for its Miles sound API and Bink video codec, the Kirkland, Washington-based company has just launched Pixomatic, a software rasteriser for x86 CPUs, which it claims offers graphics performance equivalent to a DirectX 6-level graphics card, such as nVidia's TNT2 or 3dfx's Voodoo3.



Demos of Pixomatic in action focus on effects such as bilinear filtering and dot3 per-pixel lighting effects

As for why anyone would want to run a game on what, in terms of display quality, is four-year-old technology, RAD Game Tools' **Mitch Soule** is quick to explain. "Even high-end games need a fallback to software, in case of hardware problems," he says, citing figures from Valve which put the number of *Half-Life* players who run the game in software at 40 per cent. Also, many massmarket 3D games, such as *The Sims*, use software rendering to increase the number of machines a game can run on. Simply put, the more massmarket a game's audience, the easier it has to be to get it to work, and nothing is simpler than running on the CPU.

Which is why, RAD Game Tools' aim with Pixomatic is to provide developers of games that could use or need 3D graphics but don't require massive fillrates or complex pixel shaders with a reliable and consistent technology. "Pixomatic isn't going to run *Doom III* in all its glory," Soule concedes, "but it does run *Quake II* with all features enabled." Performance for *Quake II* running at 640 x 480 is 27 frames per second for a Pentium III/733 and 60 frames per seconds on a Pentium 4.

Designed to make porting games from the standard PC technologies, DirectX and OpenGL easy, Pixomatic is what RAD Game Tools calls a straightforward implementation of a classic 3D pipeline, which uses a simple custom API. "Porting from DirectX or OpenGL is painless," Soule says. "We converted Gas Powered Game's *Dungeon Siege*, a huge DirectX game, to use Pixomatic in a couple of days and most of that time was taken up with learning someone else's codebase."

So with Pixomatic, instead of having to support a huge range of graphics hardware, programmers only have to worry about one hardware target, albeit one that can run at different clock speeds, and one driver. It's the closest thing PC developers will ever get to coding for a console.

The men behind Pixomatic

The spark for the development of Pixomatic came with the reunion of noted programmers Michael Abrash and Mike Sartain at RAD Game Tools. They had previously worked together at Microsoft, specifically on Xbox projects. "Michael was interested in trying to write a rasteriser using CPU optimisations such as SSE, MMX and 3DNow!, as he had written several in the past including one for *Quake II*," Mitch Soule says. "We thought it was the right time for software rendering to make a comeback as well, so Michael got to work on the low-level guts, while Mike Sartain did the high-level and 2D work."

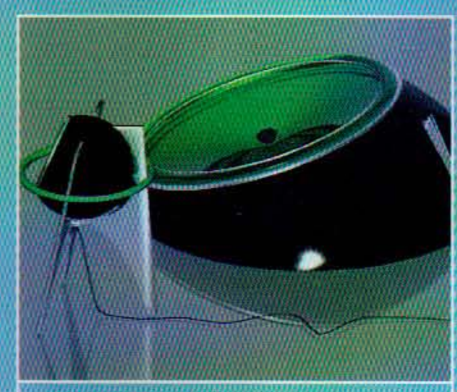
The result is a technology designed to bring features such as two-pass multitexturing, Gouraud, specular fog, alpha blending, dot3 per-pixel lighting effects, as well as 24bit z-buffers and 32bit colour depth in software to most PCs sold since 1997, including all Pentium 4, Pentium III, Celeron, Athlon, and K6-based machines. Licensing Pixomatic, which includes source code, costs $10,000 (£6,100) per game released.



The days of software renderers aren't over: amazingly, a Valve survey claims that 40 per cent of *Half-Life* users run the game in software, while the figure for games such as *The Sims* may be even higher

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



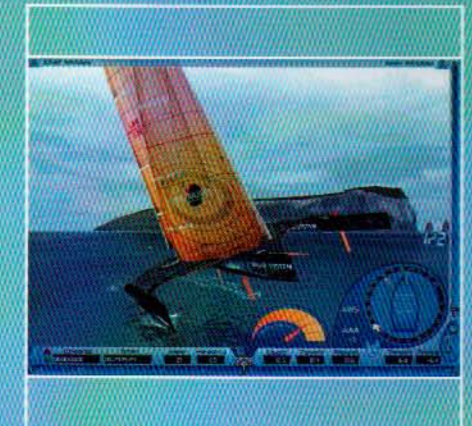


Initial sketches for the Herao Xbox speakers. Hey, if you can do any better, now's your chance



Herao, Herao, it's good to be (purple and) black: 5.1 speakers for the GameCube, or a set of lilac boules?







"Ryo, those sailors you were looking for... we've found them. They're on a boat." "I see."

01 Herao quest

UK: Regular readers will be aware that **Edge** doesn't often run competitions. And when **Edge** does run competitions they're normally understated geek pride Q&A affairs – how many bytes in the original *Spacewar!* code, or something suitably elitist. This time is different, because you're going to use your imagination. Peripheral manufacturer Herao is providing **Edge** readers with the opportunity to create their dream console add-on. It can be anything: cable, control device, speakers, whatever, as long as it's denoted with a clear description and diagram/model. The best design will receive £500 cash, and – providing Herao deems it commercially viable – the winner's peripheral will go into production, complete with the designer's name emblazoned on the finished product. Second and third prizes of Herao speaker systems are also on offer, but to be honest, it's all about first place. **Edge** wonders if you'll ever have a better opportunity to see your name on console hardware, short of using a permanent marker on the front of your Cube. For entry forms and terms and conditions see www.edge-online.com, or write to **Edge** Competition, Lunch PR, 120 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SX. The closing date is April 30. Good luck.

02 Hello sailor

France: If sailing around in *The Wind Waker*'s whet your appetite for something wetter then take a look at *Virtual Skipper 2*, Duran Duboi's PC recreation of sailboat racing. The French developer is hoping Brits will be inspired by the antics of Ellen Macarthur to try what they claim is the "ultimate 3D regatta online simulation." **Edge** hasn't played any other 3D regatta online simulations, so it couldn't comment, but one thing's for sure; *Virtual Skipper 2* will be one of those rare games in which players will hope to avoid piracy as much as the developer. And those hoping for a console version may be disappointed: it could prove hard to port. Ho ho.

Soundbytes

"*Tetris* Pop. Acts created to fit a specific youth demographic identified by marketing executives. For example, Avril Lavigne."
'Popbitch' introduces some game-inspired slang.

"Today videogame addiction is becoming an ever increasing problem, comparable now, even to alcohol and drug abuse. While videogame companies continue to market violence aimed at vulnerable children and young teens. And the newest absurdity, underground videogame cultures which takes gaming to another level, tainted with online 'clans', singling out of people, hatred, racism and sexism."
Mothers Against Videogames And Violence (aka David Yoo) let rip.

"One of the impressive things is the way it treats architecture, which is very realistic and alluring. The shot of a helicopter hovering over *Vice City* is so detailed you can see the whirl of the rotor blades above the skyline of the city."
Alice Rawsthorn, director of the Design Museum, explains *Vice City*'s inclusion in the final four for the £25,000 Designer of the Year award.

03 Eliminating batteries part I

US: Okay, pay attention. In order to see the GBA's poorly-crafted screen, players need a powerful light. Now, what's the most powerful light in the solar system? The sun! So it follows that hardcore gamers who demand the best from their systems should only ever game on handhelds in direct sunlight. And what's the sun also really good at? Providing energy. Which is exactly what Gemini Industries have harnessed with their Solar Pak, a solar-power add-on that supplements the GBA's energy batteries with rays from the heavens. "Accented by futuristic aesthetics," at least according to the press release, the Solar Pak launches in the US in March, priced at $30 (£18).

04 Eliminating batteries part II

UK: You'll excuse Out There if it gets the GBA screen-sniping out of its system this month, because pretty soon, thanks to the launch of the front-lit GBA SP, it won't be able to. That's old news, of course; those really on the cutting edge of handheld moneygrabbing will have their limited edition *Final Fantasy Tactics* SP on order already. The pearl white machine, which launches on Valentine's day alongside the common or garden SP, comes bundled *Tactics Advance*, a carrying pouch and a 'premium-quality strap'. And, of course, while it has a screen that's perfectly visible even in complete darkness, fans of the whinier side of Out There needn't worry: even this special edition of the upgraded machine still lacks a headphone socket, so the handheld bitching can continue.

05 The sun always shines on TV

Japan: But for those who think the real problem with the GBA is that it's not a console, Nintendo present the GameCube player add on, a GBA cartridge adaptor which plugs neatly into the bottom of the GameCube, and turns your moderately expensive next-gen system into an earthbound handheld. Finally, you can play all the GBA's great games, most of which are Super Famicom ports, on your TV – a lot like you could on a real Super Famicom, if you hadn't sold it on eBay to fund your GameCube. You lucky, lucky people. And if that wasn't enough to part the money from the wallets of easily-pleased retrogamers, Japanese peripheral manufacturer Hori is releasing the Hori Digital Controller at the end of February. Sounds grand, but you know what it looks like? Ah, it's 1991 all over again.

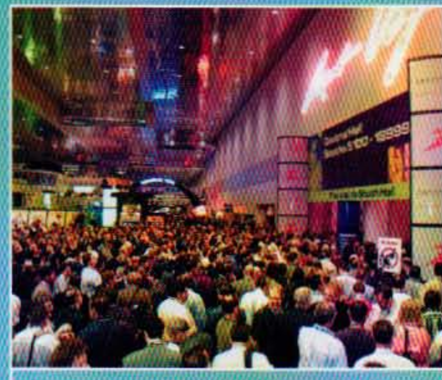
Data Stream

Entries for Data Stream found this month*: 1

*Data Stream is on holiday. Normal service will be resumed next month.



Correct **Edge** if it's wrong, but isn't bling-bling fever a little, well, 2001? Solar panels are just so passé


The crowd at the CES continue their brave, endless scavenger hunt for freebies worth putting on eBay


Edge wants an SP version that charges the system with the light from the frontlight. Perpetual genius




Oh, it's a game. **Edge** thought *FF Tactics* meant press X, watch a cut-scene, press X, go up a level





So, thanks to Hori, you'll be able to play your 16bit conversions on TV using a 16bit pad. That's brilliant!



But it has competition in the 'Super Nintendo', a console which gives similar results, much cheaper



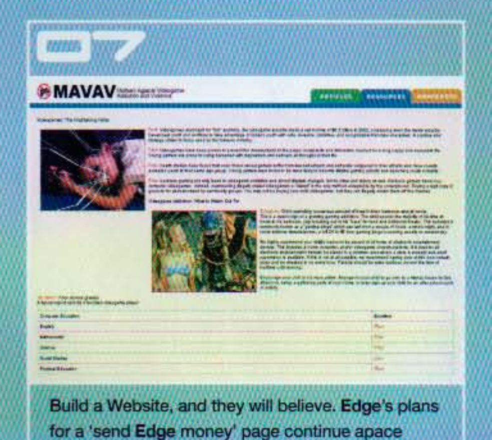
You won't see the red line unless your room is full of smoke. In which case you should probably get out







Vampire Night and *Time Crisis 2* are both Scorpion3 compatible. *Dance Dance Revolution*, sadly, isn't

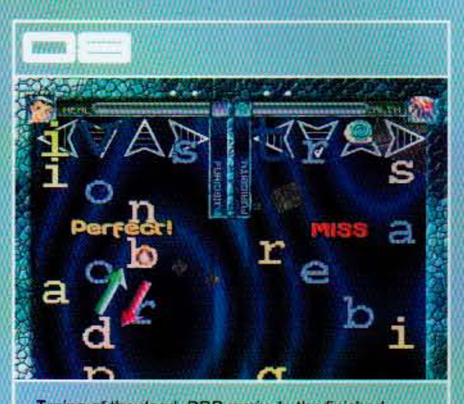


Build a Website, and they will believe. **Edge**'s plans for a 'send **Edge** money' page continue apace



On the other hand, this is pretty disturbing. Videogames are evil. **Edge** must kill, kill you all





Typing of the dead, *DDR* remix. In the finished version, the letters will be appropriate to the lyrics



If only *DoAX* had a nightclub in the casino. Dancing to B*Witched's 'Jesse Hold On'? Dream. Come. True

06 Blazin' (laser) squad

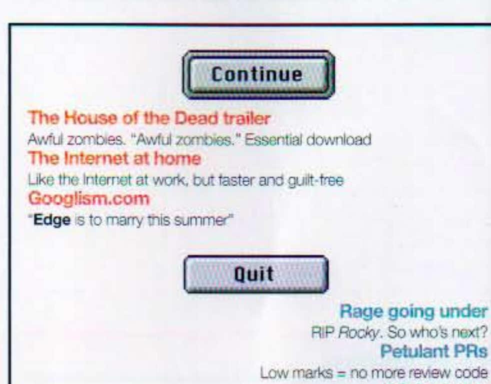
UK: See, this is a sure fire (sorry) way to attract **Edge**'s attention: send a product to the magazine which contains the warning, "CAUTION: Laser Radiation." Sadly – or perhaps thankfully, since **Edge** can't really decide if having a lethal weapon would be as cool as Mel Gibson makes out – the lightgun inside the parcel wasn't as dangerous as anticipated. In its favour, though, Blaze's Scorpion3 is the only PS2 lightgun with a 100Hz mode, so those with fancy TVs can finally have their own laser-accurate Vampire Nights and Time Crises. No projector or plasma support, though: budding peripheral designers take note…

07 MAVAV makes me want to smoke

US: "Your final project," read **David Yoo**'s Interactivity & Programming assignment sheet,"is going to be to make a fully functioning hoax." So Yoo, a student at Parsons School of Design, New York, did just that. And with with some aplomb, too, crafting a Web campaign, "MAVAV: Mothers Against Videogame Addiction and Violence," that would cause videogamers across the globe to explode with apoplexy. For days, the site travelled among gaming's hardcore like an outrage virus; it was too believable to be a wind-up, yet too extreme to allow weary gamers to shrug and pass it off as a (yet another) half-hearted attempt on their hobby. Perhaps it was too perfect, because while MAVAV has long-since been declared a hoax, the angry emails continue to roll in. See http://dexter.parsons.edu/~dyoo/2002-3/interactivity/mavav/ for Yoo's dissection of events.

08 Sound of the underground

US: Listen, Konami, you know **Edge** loves you and everything you've done for this Rhythm Nation, but maybe it's time for a change. And like all the best Revolutions, this one's comes from the people. *Feet of Fury* is a dancemat game for the Dreamcast which takes the emphasis away from singleplayer excellence and puts it back on player-vs-player competition. There's also a Typing of Fury mode for those who'd rather bust moves with their digits. "We hope you'll agree that it's a *step* in the right direction for beat games," puns developer Cryptic. **Edge** cringes, but secretly can't wait to slip on its dancing shoes and find out. More information at www.cagames.com/





09 ScreenPlay

Academic essays about videogames tend to be notoriously patchy affairs. It's just too easy for specialists in other, more mature fields of media analysis, to mug gamers with whatever brand of sub-Baudrillardian mumbo-jumbo they happen to be peddling that month. Thankfully, the authors of 'ScreenPlay', a selection of musings comparing and contrasting games and films, manage to restrain themselves from overciting film critics such as Mulvey and Bordwell. Even more impressive, most of them seem to have actually played a couple of videogames, which always helps.

That stated, however, less than half of the essays say anything worthwhile. A classic example is 'Die Harder, Try Harder', which takes the classic series of films and then attempts to say something interesting about Fox's mediocre game tie-ins. Another essay ambitiously looks at the music of *Cool Boarders 2*, *Medievil 2* and *Alien Trilogy* – a disparate grouping if ever there was one. Other authors, notably Paul Ward, pose a good subject – videogames as remediated animation – but fail make anything concrete from it.

Yet there are a couple of gems which validate the whole exercise: in particular Tanya Krzywinska's 'Hands-on Horror'. A novel examination of user control with respect to the horror genre of both games and films, it turns much conventional wisdom, especially that relating to cut-scenes, on its head. Another point worthy of more analysis made well by a number of others, including Jo Bryce and Jason Rutter, is the value games and special effect blockbusters both place on the spectacular over and above that of narrative.

10 Flash MX Games

They don't get the same attention as the latest multi-console broadband-enabled triple-A-licence shoo-ins, but more people play Web games than any other type of interactive entertainment. They also make an ideal starting point for those interested in making games but without the time or the inclination to get to grips with the latest flashbang functionality of tools such as UnrealEd or Worldcraft. This is where Nik Lever's most recent 'How To' guide comes into play.

Targeted at those without programming skills, it relies on Macromedia's increasingly feature-heavy Flash MX and its ActionScript language, to demonstrate the basics behind simple Web games. As Lever himself points out, explaining his opening *Pong!* example, starting with Flash is broadly similar to the early days of BASIC bedroom programming, on which the UK development scene is based. Once the basics have been learned, its potential is much greater, however, not least because Flash MX supports 3D graphics – something covered in a chapter on building maze-based games.

Another areas explored include building quiz games that integrate into a SQL backend server, multiplayer games and high-score tables. But most users will probably be happiest playing around with the 2D platformers, which despite their usual description of being 'simple' can be quite involved in terms of programming requirements. Even more advanced is the vector-based collision detection in the topdown football game example, but Lever's user-friendly tutorial style, which is backed up by accompanying CD and Website support should get most keen students through.

09



Author: Geoff King & Tanya Krzywinska (eds)
Publisher: Wallflower Press
ISBN: 1 903364 23 X

10



Author: Nik Lever
Publisher: Focal Press
ISBN: 0 240 51903 5

11



Site: **Oldergames**
URL: **www.oldergames.com/v2/**

11 Website of the month

Oldergames' main intention is to support classic game enthusiasts by releasing and developing new games for long-dead gaming systems – or rather, to user the site's more politically correct terminology, systems that have been 'orphaned'. Current projects include a handful of titles for the 3DO and Mega-CD, and their flagship work is *Hell Hotel* for the Dreamcast. But it's another DC project that'll arouse the most interest. On their schedule for a 2004/2005 release is *Half-Life*, the company claiming that they have the only complete copy of the DC code in the world. It's easy to be slightly sceptical about the whole business, but it's a noble (if slightly bizarre) cause, and **Edge** wishes them well.

12



Japan: Microsoft's intriguing, if not entirely convincing, Xbox marketing exercise continues in Sony's homeland. This month it's Xbox Live time. **Edge** would explain it, dear reader, but your brain might explode from such a sudden and unexpected revelation.



MUSAC plays. A voice in the headset says: "Don't push the button." What does our protagonist do?



"Oops, I pushed it," he says. Sound of trap door opening and abracadabra, he's gone.



Sound of trap door opening in reverse. MUSAC still plays. Screen goes a bit black. And red.



Our chap is back. Voice in headset: "Don't look behind you."



"I'd like to," he responds, "but…"



"Aaaaaaaaaah!" "Aaaaaaaaaah!" he screams. Twice.



Sound of trap door opening. Voiceover: "Online gaming in which you can speak. Xbox Live is here!"

RedEye remembers the first time he fell in love. With a girl, that is. And what a girl. RedEye was 15, and she was new to school. Her parents had just immigrated from Australia – her dad was a professor of something or other, and he'd swung an unbelievably cushy job lecturing at the local college. The British educational system would exact its revenge on him later, though, when his wife slept with RedEye's school's woodwork teacher. But both Rebecca – let's call her Rebecca, or Becky, oh, Becky – and RedEye would both have left school by then, and it's not important to the story anyway. Just collateral damage.

Anyway, Becky was in RedEye's class, and, thanks to the miracle of sequential surnames and arbitrary class arrangements, sat next to him in History and Geography from the beginning of term right up until the end of that school year. It is no coincidence that RedEye's grades in those lessons were far below what he was capable of. He still has the exercise books, full of passed notes, scribbled caricatures of teachers, desperate attempts at humour. None of it worked. Get ready for the ahhh, kids: Becky wasn't interested in RedEye.

Thing is, it really shouldn't have mattered. Becky wasn't beautiful. She wasn't unattractive, sure, but there were prettier girls, smarter girls, funnier girls, girls who playground lore guaranteed would take you to places you'd previously only seen in Biology. But when Becky spoke, that was it. From the moment she said hi. If she was to say RedEye, she would say 'RadOi'. If she was to say RedEye, man, there would be trouble. RedEye would regress, right now, and grow spots and a bad fringe and a feeling of absolute stone-solid *lust* in his heart for that girl.

Snobbery is innate in those who believe they have the smarts. We are all attracted to things that are rare, different, because appreciating those things makes us believe we are connoisseurs. We may not even be aware we are doing it, but we do it all the time. This is why people who think they know a lot about music choose to like band X that no one's heard of, why film buffs name Swedish epics as their favourites. And it is present, naturally, in videogames. Is that piece of furniture you're after in *Animal Crossing* really aesthetically superior to the stuff you've already got, or do you just want it because no one else has it?

But it also manifests itself as racism. Generalising, of course, so perhaps *you're* different because *you're* perfect, but hardcore gamers love Japan. They consider it their homeland, dream of being on first-name terms with shop owners in Akihabara, of high-fiving the teddy boys in Shinjuku park, of local noodle bars and overpriced alcohol, of tiny Japanese girls treating them like David Beckham. Of being an accepted gaijin; it is utopia, and it is the home of the best videogame makers in the world.

(Former **Edge** editor Tony Mott tells a good story about a Nintendo press conference at E3. A guy from a Website, rising sun bandana tied tightly across a sweating forehead, awaits the Q&A section at the end. As soon as the call for questions comes, he leaps up, and, in a desperate bid to impress the assembled journos and (more importantly) "Mr Miyamoto-san" himself, he stammers through his suck-up questions in Japanese. The question finishes, and there is an awkward pause. Eventually, Miyamoto-san just smiles, shakes his head, and says, "What?")

'Otaku' isn't a good term, you know. It means unhealthy obsession. It's the mac-wearers who queued up for *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. It's not glam, different, interesting. It's dirty, pathetic, lonely. We can laugh at hentai, and *Sexy Beach* seems a harmless enough game for wankers (see Out There, **E**120), but if a western company had released a game like that it wouldn't be quirky, just sad. And if they'd gone further, and put out *Battle Raper* or *Sodomy Force* or any number of games featuring schoolgirls defiled by tentacles? The videogame community would be outraged. But we let Japan get away with it, because, hey, they're a different culture, and it's all a bit of fun, and they're exotic and exciting and we are head over heels in love with them.

RedEye doesn't believe that the Japanese are really any better at making videogames than the west – just that they happen to have made some of the best, and that mediocre games of theirs appear exotic and interesting to us and that makes them more than mediocre. Take scripting as an elemental example. Videogames with terrible dialogue are damned over here, but we forgive Japanese stuff because, hey, it's lost in the translation, and the bad grammar and bad spelling's just part and parcel of the experience, and it's crazy and we can laugh at it. Only it's probably not lost in the translation; it's just bad writing, translated badly, and we're idiotic, patronising fools.

A land of invention? Christ, EA has nothing on the sequential habits of the Japanese: Capcom, Taito, beloved Nintendo, Enix, all companies who thrive on squeezing franchises to within an inch of their commercial lives. And Square, Square is the worst. *Kingdom Hearts*, whatever its merits as a game, was nothing more than a cynical attempt at hitting the Japanese market dead on, old *Final Fantasy* characters and Disney all wrapped up in a (typically absurd) plot which makes a nonsense out of any of the series' previous lighthearted attempts at coherence.

RedEye's been reading a lot of ill-educated comment recently about western design, and most of it seems to be rooted in cultural snobbery. *Sudeki* uses Japanese aesthetics, and gets damned for it. They're bland, apparently, although RedEye can't help but think that if they'd come from Sega they'd be labelled sumptuous by the same people, people furiously masturbating over 'Famitsu' as they anxiously await their copy of *DoAX*. And there are other examples – Rare moved from eastern hands to the west, revealed a new manga Joanna Dark and got criticism from bitter Nintendo kids for ruining their heroine. Silly, ghost-white otaku desperate to prove just how genuine they are.

If this is hardcore, then fuck the hardcore, or let them fuck themselves. It has as much to do with gaming as kissing Australians: RedEye never did kiss Becky, and it's not like he really cares any more. The accent was thrilling, but there's more to life than being different.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

There's more to life than being different

"We are all attracted to things that are rare, different, because appreciating those things makes us believe we are connoisseurs"

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge's***

Condensation mists on my visor, and eldritch, ghostly sound effects chirrup, clang and squawk. Slowly, I round a corner, and... What. The. Hell. Is. That? A Magmoor, perhaps, or a mother Sheegoth, or (heaven help me) an Omega Pirate. The creatures of *Metroid Prime* are constructions of awe-inspiring malevolence: whether made of rock, ice or supernatural energy fields, they are almost as beautiful as they are threatening. One thing this game does very well indeed is to stage-manage the dramatic encounter with the enemy. And a powerful sense of enemy is one of those difficult-to-quantify but easy-to-recognise qualities that good action videogames will strive to evoke.

In *Prime*, of course, as well as in other games, the sense of enemy depends not merely on drawing an interesting-looking foe, but on many areas of design conspiring together. The long periods of near-silent, lonely exploration on the abandoned spaceship and then on Tallon IV, with the exquisite rusting architecture and weather effects, work to imbue a sense of a real, living environment – not a cunning bath of polygons the level designers knocked up in a week or two, but someone else's home, in which you are trespassing. It is the same management of tempo that made the early *Tomb Raider* games impressive: the longer you go without unholstering your guns, the more meaningful a violent encounter becomes. The enemy as yet unseen and only imagined is the most worrying.

Unfortunately, *Prime* undercuts this dramatic structure with the thoroughly bogus decision to feature respawning minor foes. Now it could be argued that respawning creatures in this game are necessary to make your travels more interesting, given that the game's environmental layout demands so much backtracking. But to argue that way is like stabbing someone in the arm, and then stabbing them in the leg to distract them from the pain in their arm. It would be better never to have stabbed them at all. Games that hard-wire a requirement to backtrack so much are taking the concept of value for money to a dubious extreme.

Moreover, the artificiality – the obvious programmedness – of *Prime*'s respawning enemies tends to make it more difficult to suspend one's disbelief in general. If you know that defeating an enemy will not have a permanent effect – if he'll just zap back to life when you come back to the room – then the requirement to dispatch him is no longer an exciting challenge but a chore.

Prime remains a superb game, almost unrivalled in the density of its visual imagination and engineered to provide regular shocks of wonder and surprise. But the game clearly represents two different ways of managing the sense of enemy: a right way, with the aesthetically splendid bosses, and a wrong way, with the respawning pirates and their not-so-cuddly friends, who just represent a set of tedious, anonymous obstacles.

One way in which other games seek to inspire a sense of enemy is by using human enemies that can talk, and whom you can encounter a few times before the final showdown in order to build up some very basic species of emotional history with them. (Arguably, a person or monster you have only just met cannot be an enemy except in the most abstract sense.) The dramatic structure of the first *Metal Gear Solid* is seminal in this regard: I developed a visceral personal hatred for Vulcan Raven before I finally killed him in the freezing warehouse, and the showdown with the Metal Gear was compelling precisely because the machine was being piloted by Liquid. (By a not-so-strange trick of arithmetic, having to destroy five automated Metal Gears in the sequel is less than one-fifth as entertaining.)

Still, the boss encounter as a game paradigm is highly artificial, and if you are not going to acknowledge and play creatively on that artificiality as Kojima-san does, it increasingly seems like a relic of gaming's past. It might even be argued that games which need impressive boss encounters are precisely those which need to make up for the fact that their hordes of 'normal' enemies are uninspiring, unengaging combatants. Maybe one of the reasons I'm still playing *Halo* is precisely because it does not feature so much as a single 100-foot tall, laser-eyed reptile with conveniently dodgy knees, whose appearance would become just boring the third time round; instead, the carefully timed introduction of each new and more fearsome enemy species just adds combinatorially to the warfare possibilities.

Because it features such a relatively small variety of adversaries, the game manages to characterise each type to a rare degree: you know these enemies by the way they behave, even by the way they sound, as much as by the way they look. Know thine enemy, runs the old advice; concomitantly in videogames, only adversaries that you can know to this degree of sophistication become true enemies.

Psychologically, it is perhaps increasingly desirable to be convinced in such games that we are dealing with an enemy, and not just performing a high-speed object-targeting-and-manipulation puzzle of the sort that has long been familiar. Of course it is satisfying to blow a kilometre-long spaceship to gloriously rendered smithereens, or to defeat a huge mutant plant after finding out where its weak points are, but such actions can be executed with a certain impersonal disengagement. A true enemy, on the other hand, engages the whole mind.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

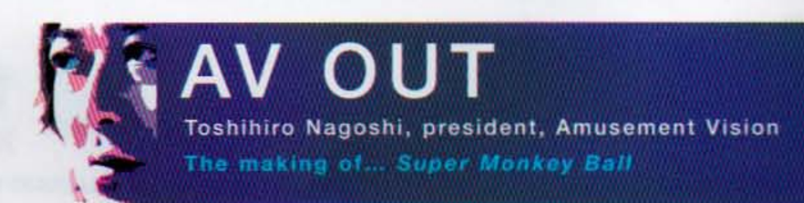
Videogaming behind enemy lines

But this isn't to say that the solution is necessarily hundreds of lines of B-movie script. "You killed my polygonal father!" is not the only way. After all, one of the most memorable enemies in the history of videogaming is the Mutant in *Defender*. A barely-there clump of pixels, but a murderous trajectory, a horrible noise, and a vengeance-crazed reminder of your own failure. Meanwhile, no developer yet has quite captured the loathsome magnificence of HR Giger's creature designs for 'Aliens', and the implacable menace of their scuttling movements. A videogame alien that really did seem terrifyingly alien, in both its appearance and its unpredictable behaviour, would be a refreshing change.

"Know thine enemy, runs the old advice; concomitantly in videogames, only adversaries that you can know become true enemies"

Perhaps in future years, some designers might begin to fulfil the promise of offering truly worthy adversaries. A Moriarty to your Sherlock Holmes; a Commodus to your Maximus; a Saruman to your Gandalf. Even an army of angels to your Miltonic Satan. In a way, a true enemy is someone you care about.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

The making of... Super Monkey Ball

Hi! 2003 has begun, and I'm hard at work on my current project. But the other day, someone asked me about my plans until the summer. I get the same questions all the time: "When are you going to complete this game?" or "What's that game about?"

But this is business, so there are things we have to do, one of which is to talk to the marketing department, and provide them with updates and clues as to the content of the game. To be honest, I really dislike doing these 'interviews'. Why? Because I hate thinking about deadlines. And also, when you talk about ideas before they're in place, your enthusiasm for them can fade. Moreover, when I speak to someone about my game, there's always the chance the person's going to have a negative reaction, and this makes me nervous. Which in turn means I lose confidence in my project.

I know it's simple psychology, but this kind of stuff really has quite an impact on me. Your feelings are so important. Yes, I make games and I'm paid for that, and I'm fortunate that it's my living. But I would like to say that I *live* for making these games. Of course, the ultimate objective is to sell these games. But in order to achieve that, I have to make them first. So, I use so much energy and time in this process that I don't have much time to think about any other things. Which is another reason why I hate being asked questions about them in interviews.

I know, some of you are thinking, "What a sissy!" Well, of course I also think about selling my games. I'm aware it's a vital issue. Before making a game, I think about what I want to do, and to whom I'm selling the game. That means I have to think about the content and the way users will enjoy it. I never forget these issues. But if you think too much about them, they narrow your thinking and ideas become harder to find. Focusing on marketing, on demographics, mostly results in very average titles. Of course, the risk you take is also more limited. But if everyone did that, everyone would make the same game; they'd all look the same. So, my personal policy is to find the best balance between how far you can follow the marketing logic and how much you ignore it. Not easy.

In addition, since I work as part of a team, I want to use everyone's ideas in the design process. Not every idea, naturally, but if someone has a good idea, then of course it should be considered. If you do that, you can polish the game's content and also increase the staff's motivation in that project. As you can see, the producer's personality is as much a part of the game as the original design document, and you should also see that this is completely incompatible with the marketing logic. And, like everything, it all comes down to balance.

So, you have these two ways of producing a game. The marketing process starts from the market data and then seeks an idea to support it. The opposite logic begins from an idea and then builds towards the marketing side. There's also the technical side of things, but providing you have the expertise, you should be able to find the best way to develop your game involving your entire team. So, when I said that feelings are important, I meant those of the whole team. Am I trying too hard to look cool? I'm sorry, but I mean it. Many creators have big egos, but there are also a number without, and that's important.

"I'm not the central element in the game design, and if someone has a better idea than me, it has to be used for the good of the game"

When I think back to projects I've worked on, sometimes a member of the team has come up with a idea, and what began as my game concept has finished closer to his idea. I'm repeating this, because it is important: I'm not the central element in the game design, and if someone has a better idea than me, it has to be used for the good of the game. *Super Monkey Ball* is a prime example of this. If I'd had this idea about a game with a monkey in a ball, rolling on the floor in order to reach a goal; not mentioning all the minigames and that the game would be targeted at children… everybody would have said, "Nagoshi is over." It's not just me, though – if anyone had this entire concept from the start, it would have little chance to be passed. No, the process has to be more natural. You start from a basic idea and get to the details later.

Rolling. That was my basic idea. I wanted it to be easy to control. I wanted the ball transparent with a character inside. The stage designs, mechanisms and tricks – they all came from the level designers, not me. The physical joy in making the ball fun to roll, and the all of the minigames, they came from my programmers, as well as the fourplayer mode. I just decided which bits would remain in the final game.

When we had to find a title, we came up with *Super Monkey Ball* because, well, just because it sounded cool. I know this may seem a little simple but it's true. It was the result of a collective search in the heat of an intense meeting, and it just came out! I think that's okay as a process, right? Maybe that's why the game has this strong festival spirit! But I hope you can see now why this game couldn't have been made by me alone. It's a collective effort, and I believe this style of work is a good thing. I mean it is my style, although it doesn't apply to every game I develop. And sometimes I feel this pressure, screaming "I have to do something!"

That sort of individual effort can often help improve a project's overall quality, although, in the case of *Super Monkey Ball*, I'm glad we enjoyed much more open development conditions. But I will tell you something. During the development I really felt fear! I knew I could not respond to critics, because it was a game that came from an idea, not a demographic. What if people said things like "What's that? What a weird game!" I could not tell them "It is okay. This is a game which has been developed carefully according to marketing statistics." But, hopefully, people welcomed it positively, regardless of its origin. And the game was only possible because the team became one. Yes, feelings are very important. I hope to experience that kind of development again soon.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

They've asked me to introduce myself, but it's not something I'm used to doing. In the flesh, I usually confront unfamiliar social situations by piercing the air with a strange, undulating hissing sound, and that's a difficult thing to put across in print. Especially when you're being paid to fill a page with interesting and florid prose. Or should that be 'interesting and florid P Rose'? Do you see?

I'll be honest with you up front; this whole games journalism thing was never part of the plan. I fell into it by accident – I was supposed to be an astronaut or, for one brief and unrealistic moment, something – anything – to do with monkeys. But unless you're spectacularly focused (and I'm far too easily distracted by my demons, specifically crack cocaine, to be focused upon anything other than self-induced catatonia), life never quite flows the way you expect.

It wouldn't be too trite to say the life of a games journalist chose me, but whichever way you look at it



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

The accidental journalist

the fit seemed to work. It's been ten years since I first picked up a joypad for professional gain, and ten years since I last paid money to play a game. Heck, for a long time I'd even managed to talk my former Teletext oppressors into paying me a monthly stipend to visit the arcades (for 'reviews'). Yes, they really were that gullible.

And yet, in many respects, as far as most games journalists go, I was always on the fringes of the comfort zone. I was the proverbial eunuch in the virgin baths. Sure, games gushed through my letterbox on a regular basis, but I can count the freebies and the overseas jollies and the lunches on the fingers of half a hand. I never even went to E3.

I don't know why this was. Perhaps everyone in the industry hated me. But if they did, then I'm glad they did, because I was able to crow on about my lack of bias, and the fact that I was un-fingered by the filthy hands of the public relations lotharios, and it made me look really great and decent and principled and all that. I could happily make out that I was uncorruptible, because nobody ever tried to corrupt me. But at least I realised how lucky I was.

See, most games journos don't realise how good they have it. Oh, sure there are better-paid professions, but the average gamesplayer in the street would kill to be in our position. Or, at the very least, literally whore themselves to Peter Molyneux. Games on tap, often months before they're officially released? Access to all the most up-to-date hardware? All expenses-paid jaunts to LA and Japan? Frankly, it's a ludicrously cushy life. So much so, that I have – on at least two occasions – come close to stabbing a journo in the knees because he's had the bare-faced gall to whinge about deadlines, or the fact that he has to – boo-hoo – traipse around a developer's studio and play some games.

On one notable occasion, I was in a group of about 20 writers and forced into a coach seat beside one particularly loathsome skank. He spent the entire journey complaining to a colleague about what a waste of time the whole trip had been. Here was someone who was getting paid to write a feature, be put up in hotels, be given a sack-load of freebies, and then be treated to a slap-up meal and free drinks – and yet still managed to think he was hard done by. But don't worry, I had the last laugh. By doing a blow-off on his ice-cream. Not really.

This incident is sadly indicative of the majority of UK games journalists; they think the industry owes them a living (or, at any rate, a trip to E3). As a consequence there's barely a games journalist in the country who can be wholly relied on for a completely honest and untainted opinion.

"I feel like a former adult film star, who – having seen the grim, behind-the-scenes reality of the porn industry – can no longer get off on dirty movies"

You can't blame them. To stay objective in such luxurious circumstances would take a feat of super-human willpower. I know, because I've been there, and for the first time in a decade I have to contemplate buying games again... and, frankly, I'm terrified from my head to my spleen.

Forty quid for something that I know isn't going to entertain me beyond a fortnight? What manner of madness is that? I know all too well the corners some reviewers cut. How can I be expected to rely on them to tell me what to buy? They haven't paid anything for the games they receive, and their review scores have been bartered over a few drinks and a hamburger. Their opinion is – whether they want you to know this or not – worthless.

Over the years, as I matured and became crippled with loathing for my fellow man, I learned to care less and less whether I upset my chums in PR (because, let's face it, I never really had any chums in public relations). But certainly there was a time in the early days of 'Digitiser' when – while never being quite so enthusiastic-to-please as some individuals and publications – I may have nudged a score up a mark or two. Oh, it was never necessarily a conscious decision, just done in the same way that you might subconsciously not send death threats to someone who you think might, possibly, fancy you.

But today, as reviewer-turned-consumer, I feel like a former adult film star, who – having seen the grim, behind-the-scenes reality of the porn industry – can no longer get off on dirty movies. All I see are unsanitary sets and unhappy people contorted into painful sexual positions by a vile director.

Y'know, the optimist in me wants to believe that when a reviewer gives a game 9/10, or 98.2 per cent, he genuinely means it. That he believes a game is worth such a score, in spite of costing a quarter of a week's wages, or three months' pocket money. That he can put aside the fact that it came into his possession gratis, and can think himself into the position of the punter, handing over the raw, cold cash for the same game in Dixons.

This isn't another rant about the cost of games (the smoke still billows following the fire-bombing of the Fairplay campaign headquarters, and I'm far too much of a coward to risk inflaming the wrath of Miles from Sports Interactive). But the fact remains that it's the job of a games reviewer to tell his audience whether a game is worth buying.

Now, looking at things from the other side of the wall, my whole criteria for which games I play has changed. Whereas two months ago I'd probably have chosen a Nintendo title above all others, with Nintendo's new focus on shorter, but sweeter, experiences I'm more likely to pay for, say, a PC roleplaying game. I don't know... maybe it has been a subtextual and subconscious rant about the price of games. Oh man! Now I'm probably going to wake up one night to find Roger Bennett from ELSPA standing over my bed, brandishing a pitchfork...

*Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s*

Edge's most wanted

Gradius V
(PlayStation2) Konami

Although the Gradius name is hardly synonymous with breaking with tradition, Treasure's involvement just adds to the lustre of an already enticing title.



Driver 3
(Xbox, PS2) Infogrames

While **Edge** only knows Florida's most famous city from 'Miami Vice', Nice and Istanbul are very familiar territory. Racing around them therefore appeals.



Halo 2
(Xbox) Microsoft

All quiet on the developer front. But **Edge** is happy to let Bungie get on with expanding the magnificent *Halo* universe. Fingers crossed for a winter 2003 release.



Killer 7
(GameCube) Capcom

No, we're not too sure about what the gameplay will involve either, but the bravely distinctive visual aesthetic has undeniably piqued our interest.



LAN Jammin'

The videogame industry gets down with the (female) kids

It's easy to pick holes in a TV show like CITV's 'LAN Jam'. It hardly solves the problems that have hampered previous attempts to televise the world of videogames after all, and it fails to address the fundamental difference between the level of enjoyment derived from simply watching people play games and that obtained from actual participation. But in one significant respect, the show is infinitely more admirable than most elements that go to make up the videogame industry.

By adopting a female presenter; by interviewing female experts; by endorsing female participation in its gaming competitions; and by featuring a significantly boy-band-heavy celebrity spot, it arguably tries harder to turn a female audience on to the potential thrill of gaming than most publishers and developers have historically ever dreamed of doing. Indeed most publishers and developers are evidently satisfied with a core audience restricted to young men. So it will be interesting to see how far the open-ended play structure of a title such as *BC* will appeal beyond this traditional demographic – or indeed, how far the voyeuristic elements of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* will outweigh its arguably female-friendly gameplay.

Because, at the risk of lazy generalisation, girls and boys do seem to play differently. One example of this can be found in the release of *The Sims Online*. Whereas *The Sims* won the admiration of a significant number of females, the decision to attempt to force social situations in *The Sims Online* has arguably attracted a horde of male players obsessed with increasing their attributes. It's difficult to imagine female players being quite as enthused by this sort of thing – and indeed *The Sims Online* hasn't sold as well as expected.

It's worth noting that *The Sims* originally required a creative risk on the part of EA, while the decision to take the series online smacks of spreadsheet logic. Perhaps one conclusion that could be drawn from this is that if the industry is to attract a broader audience – one which might alleviate the impact of platform transitions – creative decisions need to be taken by creative people, and not left to marketing science.

On an unrelated note, **Edge**'s review policy occasionally raises the hackles of publishers, making it difficult to ensure that our prescreen and testscreen sections are as complete as they could be. While this inconveniences our readers, it's not something that we're prepared to compromise about.





034

086









Soul Calibur II



At last, the home versions of this exquisite sequel are nearing completion, boasting special guest fighters and new modes. A guaranteed success? Namco is taking nothing for granted…



There are few certainties in the videogame industry. Those attending Namco's January press announcement regarding the consumer release of *Soul Calibur II* will attest to that. Face it, when the CEO of Namco, Yoichi Haraguchi, and the vice-CEO of Nintendo Shinji Hatano, both mount the stage to voice concerns about the state of the industry – and their place in it – you know these are strange days indeed.

For Namco, it's the old war with Sega. Recent coin-ops *Tekken 4* and *Soul Calibur II* have suffered badly against *Virtua Fighter 4* and *VF4 Evolution*, and on PlayStation2, *VF4* has made a considerable dent in the dominance of *Tekken*. Meanwhile, Nintendo is worried about the quality of its Game Boy Advance and GameCube games, which haven't met up to public expectations. In 2002, only one sold more than a million copies – *Pokémon Ruby/Pokémon Sapphire* (sales of 4m and counting) – a very rare situation. This explains the close cooperation between Nintendo and Namco on the launch of *Soul Calibur II*: neither can afford to fumble this ball.

"When the CEO of Namco and the vice-CEO of Nintendo voice concerns about the industry, you know these are strange days"



Not long to wait now until the sequel to one of the most enjoyable and (still) best-looking beat 'em ups (Xbox shots above and main two on opposite page)

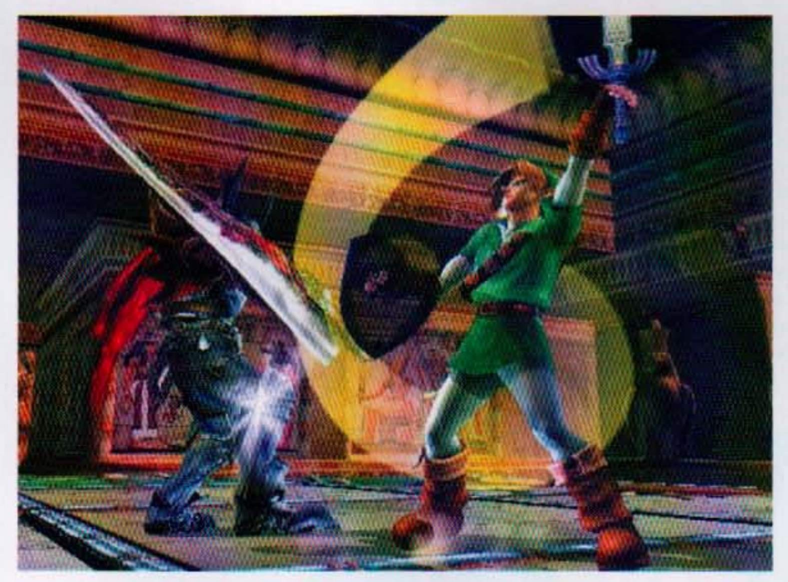
From the evidence **Edge** has procured, it should be a safe catch. Everyone knows what the coin-op offered: even more gorgeous, feature-packed visuals than the original; larger, often walled arenas to prevent constant ring-outs; four new characters (Cassandra, Yunsung, Rafael and Talim); a more or less untouched fighting system. Likely to prove the most high-profile addition for the consumer release is a range of platform-specific guest characters. The PS2 version gets *Tekken*'s Heihachi Mishima – hardly a surprise selection. The Xbox gets Spawn – a choice that *has* surprised people if only because the character is not immensely popular outside of the US, and even there his popularity is waning. Namco may well privately complain that there are few truly charismatic characters to choose from on Microsoft's machine.

The pick of the lot appears on GC. Through the close tie with Nintendo, *SCII* producer Hiroaki Yotoriyama has been able to include Link, who appears here with a realistic design, rather than as the stylised shorty of *Zelda* GC. Furthermore, each of the home versions will receive one more extra fighter – Necrid – designed by Spawn creator Todd McFarlane. This high-profile tie-in will no doubt secure the game plenty of extra coverage, although the character is rather unimpressive, and insiders suggest that Namco has been coming up with far superior stuff in-house.

Other new features include the standard console modes such as Survival, Time Attack and Practice. There'll also be a Weapon Master mode, an evolution of the Edge Master mode found in *Soul Edge* on the PSone, and less directly, the art card-collecting Mission Battle mode in the Dreamcast version of *Soul Calibur*. It's essentially a story or scenario mode, where players complete a series of fighting challenges to earn around 200 custom weapons. Fighters modified in this mode will then be available for use throughout the game.



One thing you won't find is any kind of network option – it has been pulled from the PS2 and Xbox versions to bring parity between the three platforms. This alignmen[t] factor has proved an important part of the game's production. The team actually built a highly adaptable *Soul Calibur II* OS in order [to] speed up the multiplatform development process and allow one team to complete al[l] three renditions. The OS can apparently be modified for future projects, and this kind of approach is likely to become more commo[n] this year: lone platform games are becomin[g] risky propositions nowadays (although Nam[co] is still eyeing PS2 as its main platform for th[e] foreseeable future).



GameCube owners get a 'realistic' Link to throw around the stage, a result of the close collaboration between Namco and Nintendo. The developer's decision to personalise each console version is welcome





Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 27 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**104

So, for those harbouring doubts, this is a big game. It might symbolise a new era for Japanese development, where clandestine deals between console manufacturers and game producers give way to broader strategies, taking in multiple home formats. Away from all this, it's a potentially beautiful fighting game, with near-flawless weapon-based dynamics. There are arguments over how close it is to completion – Yotoriyama-san says 50 per cent, the Namco marketing machine says 90 per cent.

Judging by the slightly rough demos that **Edge** has seen, it is to be hoped the management backs its producer, and provides the resources needed to release a triple-A title. The videogame market is not as forgiving as it once was, and Namco can ill afford to release a compromised conversion. That much is certain.







Spawn on Xbox *SCII* (left). *Tekken*'s Heihachi demonstrates the art of weaponless combat (above). The two shots above it are also from the PS2 version

Chaos Legion

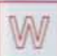
An old-fashioned slash 'em up infused with battle strategy elements appears to be Capcom's aim with its latest gothic melodrama…







These carapace-protected crossbow-wielding things prove Capcom can still design quality frea



While Capcom's most high-profile next-generation franchises – *Devil May Cry*, *Onimusha*, *Resident Evil* – offer real home console depth, you get the feeling that somewhere in the company, the heart that produced such mindless twitch-play classics as *Strider*, *Final Fight* and *Tiger Road*, is still thumping away. *Chaos Legion*, for example, may wear the exotic foliage of a next-gen action adventure, but its roots are much, much older.

In this hack 'n' slash romp (based on a Japanese fantasy novel) you play swordsman Sieg Wahrheit, out to hunt down and destroy former ally Victor Delacroix. Delacroix, it seems, has gone bad, making off with some kind of powerful artifact – previously held by the religious band he and Wahrheit were part of. Now he must be prevented from harnessing its power for evil.

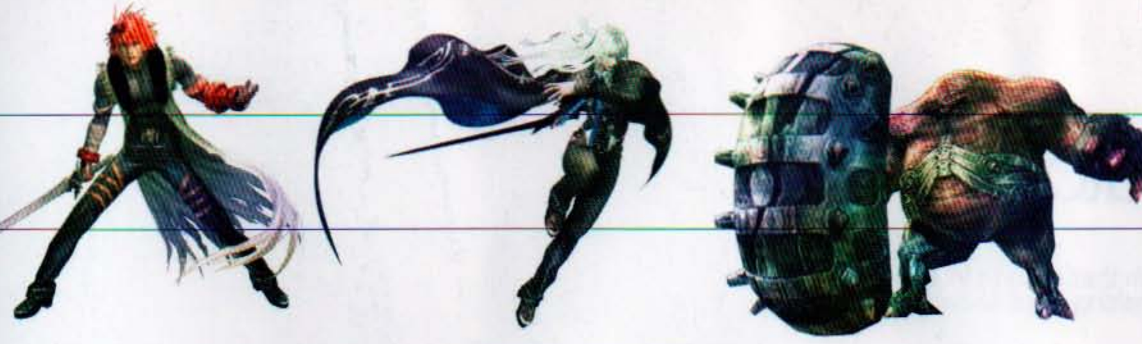
"With a large audience already committed to the Koei's Dynasty Warriors, Capcom is going to have to come up with something special"

This quest is strung out over 13 levels, each ending with a boss encounter. Along the way, players face unending swarms of enemies, teeming over the screen at a relentless 60fps. To defeat them, it's necessary to call upon the eponymous legions – small squads of ghost soldiers who can be given various defensive and offensive combat orders. There are seven different legions – archer, bomber, shield, sword, power, claw and giant – and judging by early demos it appears some of these perform one single attack before de-materialising while others stick around for set time periods.

Your ability to summon the legions looks like it is dependent on a power gauge that builds up during the fighting. There are also two female characters involved in the story between Wahrheit and Delacroix. It's not yet clear if they are controllable or whether they' just present to provide a little eye candy to sweeten the slaughter.

The scenery recalls the kind of gothic grandeur now associated with *Devil May Cr* featuring a wealth of detailed medieval buildings towering above the action. Levels are compact, and tightly structured with players fighting through a series of small chambers, unlocking new ones as they progress. This restriction of player moveme to a linear path – a tactic also employed by Sonic Team in *PSO* – allows the dev team t coax as much in the way of visual pyrotechnics as possible from the PS2 hardware without slowdown. Take a look at the screenshots, with massed ranks of monsters fighting amidst highly-detailed gothic architecture, and its clear why sacrifices have had to be made.

This isn't just a choice of graphics over gameplay – there's something else going on



Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**117







Seven legion units are available, including archer, bomber, shield, sword, power, claw and giant legion

Chaos Legion is clearly a response to the success of Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* war strategy series. While these titles have made visual compromises in order to generate huge battle fields, Capcom is aiming to win over aesthetes by offering an attractive alternative to fogging, and simplistic modelling.

A real challenge has been set here, though. The latest *Dynasty Warriors* title is due out in Japan on February 26, just two weeks before the release of *Chaos Legion*. With a large audience no doubt already committed to the Koei title, Capcom is going to have to come up with something special to grab attention. Not that this title is really going for the same level of simulation. Despite the ability to arrange your AI clan into various formations, it appears what we really have here is a glorified, singleplayer *Gauntlet*. Perhaps the real ghosts at play in this game are those of the '80s coin-ops still haunting the corridors at Capcom HQ.



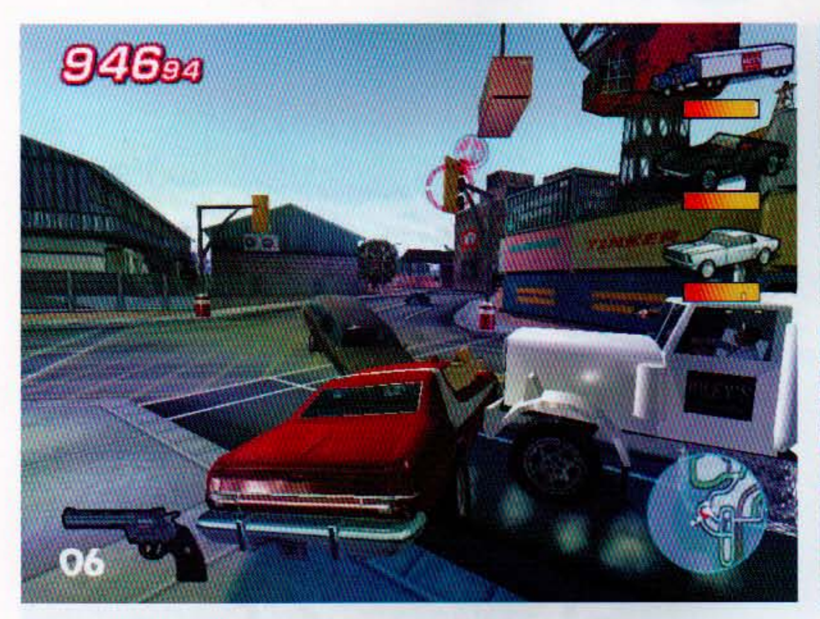




Enemies launch blitz attacks on Wahrheit and his only realistic form of defence is to summon a legion of allies to help carry out the unceasing slaughter

Starsky & Hutch

Finally, a game of Starsky & Hutch that doesn't involve you running around the playground making siren noises

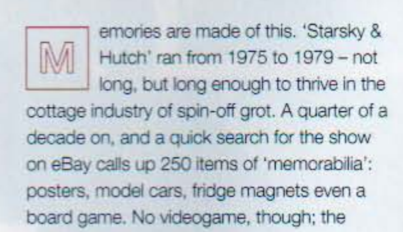












Memories are made of this. 'Starsky & Hutch' ran from 1975 to 1979 – not long, but long enough to thrive in the cottage industry of spin-off grot. A quarter of a decade on, and a quick search for the show on eBay calls up 250 items of 'memorabilia': posters, model cars, fridge magnets even a board game. No videogame, though; the suave, sharp, slightly-gay cops missed the first franchise boom by a good few years. It's time to put right society's wrongs; step forward Minds Eye, whose tribute to the fondly-remembered series is now entering its final stages of development.

"Success is measured in viewer ratings so Starsky and Hutch have to constantly play up to the camera to keep the kids interested"

Beating a season unlocks a 'special episode'. One of these has you in a ratings war with three other players - an Xbox version of this, with Live compatibility alongside the lightgun/wheel system, could be tremendous

And it's clearly a labour of love, right from the start, where comic-book cut-scenes introduce and inform the action. The game is split into seasons, and each season is comprised of a number of episodes. Episodes consist of a challenge of some sort, vehicular quests that'll be familiar to anyone who's ever played *Driver*. Perhaps a better comparison, though, is the under-rated and underexposed *World's Scariest Police Chases*. Since this is Starsky *and* Hutch, the player can both drive and shoot, directing the auto-lock reticle by subtly shifting the front of the car.

On the other hand, some players may wish to invite a Hutch to play with their Starsky. In twoplayer cooperative mode, one player shoots while the other drives. Which is fine, pleasant and predictable, but just when you think you've got the measure of the game it produces this trick from under its bell-bottoms; it supports steering wheels and lightguns, *Lucky & Wild* style. And that means while one player drives the other one shoots, except that they're *actually* shooting and the other one's really *really* driving, and if they could only find a '70s salon they'd have Soul and Glaser hairdos straight away.

Success is measured in viewer ratings, which drain away by default. That means Starsky and Hutch have to constantly play up to the camera to keep the kids at home interested – shooting fire hydrants, skidding into rows of crates, getting big air from ramps, and avoiding killing innocents. Part kudos system, part *Crazy Taxi* risk/reward, it works well, although the driving isn't without its flaws. Handling is much looser than *GTAIII* o *The Getaway* and takes some getting used to. And, without shooting the speed boosts, top speeds are pedestrian. One way of gaining ratings bonuses is by just avoiding th oncoming traffic, like *Burnout*. But it's so eas to achieve it feels like a missed opportunity.

Still, there's plenty of time for tweaking, and, to be honest, if the game's delayed any further it could work in its favour. The planne release of the 'Starsky & Hutch' film (with Be Stiller, Owen Wilson and Snoop Dogg as Huggy Bear) in late 2003 certainly won't hur Minds Eye's game, and if it's as critically and commercially as successful as *Rocky*, more retro licences could be on the way. **Edge**'s money? A sumptuous, aviation-shaded twoplayer version of 'CHiPs'.



Texturing is bland, but a gritty, realistic 'Starsky & Hutch' universe would be missing the point somewhat. Save that for the 'NYPD Blue' game

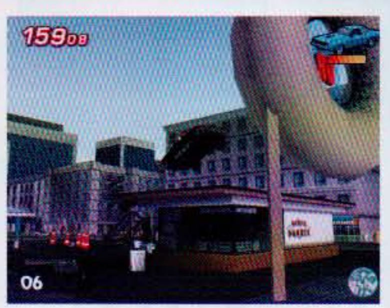
Format: **PS2, PC (GC, Xbox – TBC)**
Publisher: **Empire**
Developer: **Minds Eye**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q2**

Previously in **E**120













Starsky and Hutch resign themselves to another mission failure. Appropriate vocal signatures from the pair appear throughout, but the game could do with a wider variety – currently, they repeat early and often

Freelancer

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Digital Anvil**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Spring**

Can Digital Anvil create a freeform space epic with a storyline? **Edge** takes a look at the recent beta code



ith Westwood's online RPG *Earth & Beyond* disappointing the PC faithful on a cosmic scale and the only other gem in the online space-game heavens, *Eve Online*, still under wraps in Iceland, it seems that the ideal of making a new freeform space game in the spirit of David Braben's *Elite* or his ludicrous follow-up title *Frontier*, will remain a dream, at least in the massively multiplayer genre.

The best hope for PC fans of the space-flight genre seems to be Digital Anvil's four-year long follow-up to *Starlancer*, a game that offers both a singleplayer campaign and player-hosted freeform online multiplayer gaming.

It was with some trepidation that **Edge** booted up the beta version of *Freelancer* on the cantankerous test machine, since *Freelancer* is one of those games that threatens to either restore faith in the PC, or disappoint on an stellar scale. After a few hours of play, however, it's clear that things are looking promising for this imminent arrival.

The universe that *Freelancer* creates is huge and detailed. Flying through it gives the impression of real life going on behind the scenes, at least until you notice that many passing ships are looped and that this impression really is an illusion that falls away if you look too closely. Digital Anvil's aim is to make this world hold together as both a free playground for your space-adventurer fantasies and still carry the large and bold space-conspiracy storyline that it has built into the game. Initial impressions of this story seem positive – it's easy to get swept along in the action and mysterious events, and this element quickly becomes intriguing and compulsive, with game engine cut-scenes breaking up the space-side gun action. **Edge** suspects that this is a game that will become peculiarly engrossing, offering both the interest of narrative and the obsessive impulse of raising cash and collecting ships and equipment.

Digital Anvil has obviously worked hard to create a system that gifts the player with a game which offers a steady challenge through an interface of intuitive ease, but whether players will be convinced by the necessary restrictions on freedom and the now ageing visuals remains to be seen. Expect a review very soon indeed.











Freelancer's universe is vast. Impulse speed gives way to high-speed cruise engines, which gives way to trade lane accelerators which gives way to jump-gates for interstellar travel



Combat in space is governed by conserving your shield, which regenerates after taking a few hits, much in the style of *Halo*. Hull damage will cost you more than just money

Pocket galaxies

Freelancer enthusiasts will be able to band together and play amongst themselves on player-hosted *Freelancer* galaxies. This means that half a dozen or so players will be able to explore the far reaches of *Freelancer*'s impressive galaxy as a single combat unit, taking on the many missions and challenges that might otherwise overwhelm the lone player. It's a particularly enticing prospect.

Silent Hill 3

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q2 (Japan), 2003 (UK)**
Previously in **E**112, **E**117

A Konami blackout means those anticipating Silent Hill 3 have been kept in the dark. **Edge** switches on the lights. Boo!

"A seemingly innocent trip to a shopping centre," begins Konami's *Silent Hill 3* press release, "takes on a macabre twist." Goodness, as if you couldn't guess, and not just from the early signifier 'seemingly'. This is Silent Hill; it's unlikely any trip to a shopping centre's going to end with a new winter coat and some discounted cutlery.

Konami isn't saying much about the third episode in the *Silent Hill* series, but covert whisperings from **Edge**'s informant deep within KCEJ reveal a few things. The graphics engine has been improved to give a more realistic visual edge to the characters and scenery. The 'noise' filter is still in place, but it's not nearly as emphatic, a move that comes from a greater understanding of the PS2 architecture. Irrespective of that, the game is still very dark; not just in tone, but literally, since a gloomy palette helps the developer get around some of the hardware's limitations.

The lead character this time is a woman, Heather ("a gentle teenager"), but more will be available, perhaps from the start. There is less fleeing and more fighting, the player forced to take an aggressive stance against unflinching gruesome foes. The monsters' AI has been improved, too; they no longer make a direct path towards the hero, but follow their own personal needs. If you can find one a source of food other than yourself, they may well stop attacking you, giving you time to flee or attack while they're distracted. On the other hand, they might not stop, and you might find yourself feeling a little silly throwing fairy cakes at a many-mouthed flesh-beast. That's psychological horror for you.

Other snippets: the controls are similar, if not identical, to the previous versions. Audiophiles may be slightly distressed to hear that the company is planning to replace the 5.1 support on the PS2 version with a piece of proprietary sound technology which allows it to simulate the sound through standard stereo speakers. That's not absolutely final, though, and the Xbox version certainly has full 5.1 support.

A GameCube version of the game is also strongly rumoured, although if it does appear it'll be after the other versions, possibly during the summer months.











Fans of the series' style will be pleased to note that the third game retains the skewed camera angles that made the previous two so distinctive. As well as the disturbing darkness, of course



The shopping centre locale means *Silent Hill* steps away from the open, mist-enshrouded streets of the first two games, and into something substantially more claustrophobic. And gloomy, obviously

Hellish, insane world

Enough insider knowledge; what information does the press release reveal? Well, Heather, the lead character, becomes "trapped in an inhospitable world," and is "forced to fight for her life." So far, so videogame. "Shadowy apparitions and lumpen shapes surround her" – you'll recognise these from the first game, of course – and "grotesque creatures lurk in dark corners and rooms." Those too. In fact, the only thing we can count on from the blurb is that she'll defend herself with "pistols, a sub-machine gun, and a piece of steel." Thank goodness for spies, eh?



Yager

Format: Xbo
Publisher: TH
Developer: Yager Development Tea
Origin: German
Release: March 2

Previously in E1

THQ's ambitious space opera proves once and for all that Chuck is old news in the world of videogames



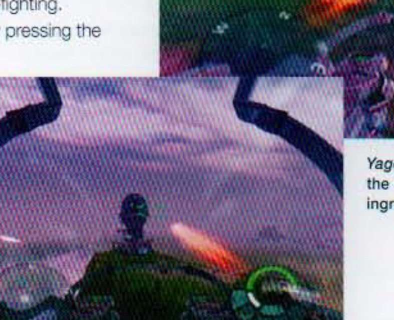


Yager may offer variety of gameplay once more ships are unlocked. The particle effects and explosions add something to the clichéd combat

Good news for those who've been following THQ's latest space combat epic in **Edge**: there's still no subtitle. But don't you get the feeling that you've seen this game somewhere before? The futuristic setting, icy blue skies and misty landscapes sure do look the spit of Lost Toys' decent, *Battle Engine Aquila*. Like two C-list celebrities turning up to an awards ceremony, we can assume that the similarities are embarrassing and purely coincidental.

In the game proper, *Yager* performs admirably. There's the now de rigueur transformable ship element, which works smoothly and adds strategy to the combat. Players can choose to hover, for stability and accuracy, or switch on the jets, for extra speed and dog-fighting. Landing and the collection of equipment is performed by pressing the 'A' button in the vicinity of the target area.

While everything shows polish and technical excellence, there's little to set the pulse racing. Dog-fighting is, well, it's what you do in every other space combat game from *Star Wars Starfighter* to *Colony Wars*. And for a game selling itself on the back of strong plotting and a non-linear mission structure the scripting and voice acting is depressingly familiar tosh. It could be a competent addition to the genre, but it's unlikely to charge your spark plugs.



Yager's development delays could have allowed the addition of the appropriate gameplay ingredients in order to spice up a familiar recipe

Group S Challenge

Format: Xbo
Publisher: Capco
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Jun

Auto Modellista's vehicle dynamics may have disappointed but that hasn't dissuaded Capcom from having a stab at the realism-influenced end of the market

Okay it's another racing game, and we've certainly been down this road countless times. Then again it's a route perhaps not that travelled on Xbox. If you object to *Project Gotham Racing*'s handling, there isn't currently much in the way of alternatives available and certainly nothing to pull up alongside the *Gran Turismo* franchise (see *Racing Evoluzione*, p94).

As far as **Edge** can tell, *Group S Challenge* does little to rock the videogame racing circle. It offers a variety of models from real manufacturers (so far Subaru, Mitsubishi, Toyota, Mazda, Nissan, Renault, Audi, TVR and Porsche-tuner specialist RUF are confirmed) as well as a number of tracks set against world cityscapes such as Tokyo, Australia and Monaco. Play options are standard, though Line Mode (which sees you earning points for practising getting the racing line right) and Duel (win and collect custom cars by going head-to-head against a rival) add a little variety.

Of course, content is nothing without control – all of the above is meaningless if the handling model isn't up to scratch. Reports suggest that the understeer nature of earlier versions has been tweaked to display more of a drift-heavy characteristic, which is good considering the rear wheel drive bias of the game's automotive selection.



It's a racing game, it's a racing game, it's a racing game. But if the handling of these machines is captured correctly then Xbox owners should at least have something to alleviate their *GT* envy





Mr Golf

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Midas Games**
Developer: **DigiCube**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 21**

There's no Tiger Woods or Colin Montgomerie, but the latest outing for the team behind Everybody's Golf is looking highly polished

Understandably, *Mr Golf* doesn't deviate too far from the well-honed formula that characterises similar Japanese golf titles, but there are several neat touches, such as the seasonal variations and extensive tutorial to help golfing novices out

Certain Japanese developers seem to have turned the development of golf titles into a fine art; just a handful of teams have been responsible for a succession of top-notch titles, such as *Mario Golf*, *Everybody's Golf*, *Tee Off* and now *Mr Golf*, which is being released in the UK by budget publisher Midas Games. It comes from the same development team behind *Everybody's Golf*, and contains all the features that any self-respecting golf title ought to contain: matchplay, strokeplay, support for up to four human or AI players (without the necessity of a multitap), a range of courses of varying difficulties and seasonal weather that affects playing conditions.

Unsurprisingly, it also features a charming cast of characters, who advance in skill the more you play with them, and plenty of unlockables, including characters and courses. In terms of control, it dispenses with power bars and makes the same paradigm shift that most recent golf titles have, towards controlling the swing by pulling back on the analogue stick and then quickly pushing forward. It also boasts a well developed tutorial to usher you through the niceties of stance and slice, etc. And although it doesn't offer any truly groundbreaking features, a quick play around reveals a pretty entertaining game under its highly polished exterior.





As you'd expect, the game allows you to hook, slice, chip and putt your way around a series of unlockable courses that escalate in difficulty

Devastation

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **NovaLogic/HD Interactive**
Developer: **Digitalo**
Origin: **US**
Release: **March**



NovaLogic signs up a promising US FPS based on the Unreal engine with added Karma





In truth, the AI looks like it needs work before it's going to be fully convincing as well as fairly challenging, but this is on the basis of early code



Devastation's unlikely to win any prizes for originality, but it's certainly comprehensive, offering a massive selection of weaponry, gadgets and play modes, and it's reasonably entertaining

It's difficult, these days, for firstperson shooters to stand out. *Devastation* hardly wins any points for originality on the basis of its dystopian cyberpunk setting, in which the corporations rule the world with an iron fist and ruthless Pacification Squads. But the game itself shows promise; it's certainly comprehensive, offering 20 singleplayer missions, 12 multiplayer maps, 42 weapons, a variety of difficulty settings and a choice of playing through missions in either arcade or simulation modes. And by utilising the Unreal engine, combined with MathEngine's Karma physics technology, the developer claims that environments will be fully interactive.

The singleplayer campaign involves all sorts of sabotage, surveillance, infiltration and hacking to flesh out the combat, and over the course of the game players will acquire eight AI sidekicks who can be controlled via simple menu and key commands. A number of neat touches include some nifty gadgets, such as the Rat Drone (essentially a remote-controlled weapon), and the ability to use noise to distract enemies or alert team-mates. **Edge** had the chance to check out a few levels set in a ruined urban setting, which were all very pretty, but the action also spans the less ruined environs of Tokyo's Shibuya and Ginza districts.

Prescreen Alphas This month's announcements and updates...

Gradius V

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house/Treasure





Edge has known about Treasure's involvement for a while now (and if you've been paying attention, so have you). The perfect antidote to the current 50 hours of (tedious) gameplay trend

Resident Evil: Dead Aim

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Shoot in firstperson using a GunCon2 and explore a cruise ship crossing the Atlantic in third. Capcom claims a genuine synergy between these two genres. Intriguing

Gregory Horror Show

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Based on a Japanese TV animation utilising CG characters and backgrounds, this 4D puzzle adventure has you trying to escape a haunted house by capturing enemies' souls. Q1 2004

Brute Force

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Digital Anvil





New content has been announced: System Link support allows fourplayer cooperative and 16player deathmatch while new maps and campaigns can be downloaded via Xbox Live

Mega Man X7

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





One of six *Mega Man* titles this year to celebrate the franchise's 15th anniversary, and the first appearance on PS2, this mixes 2D and 3D action as well as introducing a new character

Mega Man Battle Network 3

Format: GBA
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Building on the previous two RPG adventures, this latest sequel comes in *Blue* and *White* editions, each featuring its own selection of enemies, play styles and a few surprises

Mega Man Network Transmission

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





And another one, with cel-shaded characters, customisable attacks (select which chips to use in battle), over 100 offensive moves and a new storyline linking *Battle Network 1* and *2* games

Super Puzzle Fighter II

Format: GBA
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house





Columns-style action originally released in 1997 and one of Capcom's most popular creations should find itself right at home on the GBA. Needless to say, link-up play is supported

Onimusha Tactics

Format: **GBA**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**





A strategy-heavy title set in the *Onimusha* world. Conquer each map with your troops before moving on to the next, enhance your equipment and legions, use special abilities... a Q4 release

Red Dead Revolver

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Angel Studios**





A Sergio Leone-licensed soundtrack is welcome, but **Edge** remains concerned about camera problems experienced at E3. Still, the targeting system appears reworked, so here's hoping

Capcom vs SNK 2: EO

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**





Capcom and SNK's 44 combatants appear ready for Xbox and, more importantly, Xbox Live. And with Communicator support, too. Beat you online, boys and girls...

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Format: **GBA**
Publisher: **Ubi Soft**
Developer: **TBC**





At the time of going to press little has been revealed about this handheld interpretation of Ubi Soft's massively successful Xbox (and soon multiformat) stealth fest. More soon, then

Shin Sangokumusou 3

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Koei**
Developer: **In-house**





Expect evolution rather than revolution when it comes to the latest iteration of Koei's battlefield brawler; one of the notable new features to be introduced is a new weapon experience system

Shade: Wrath of Angels

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Cenega**
Developer: **Black Element Software**





It could just turn out to be another substandard *Resident Evil* wannabe, but the fact that Bohemia Interactive is overlooking the project bodes well for this time-travelling horror yarn

City of Heroes

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **NCSoft**
Developer: **In-house**





It's likely to face stiff, spandex-clad competition from Marvel's online RPG, but Korean-based NCSoft has significant online experience, as well as Richard Garriott on its roster of employees

Fire Warrior

Format: **PC, PS2**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Climax**



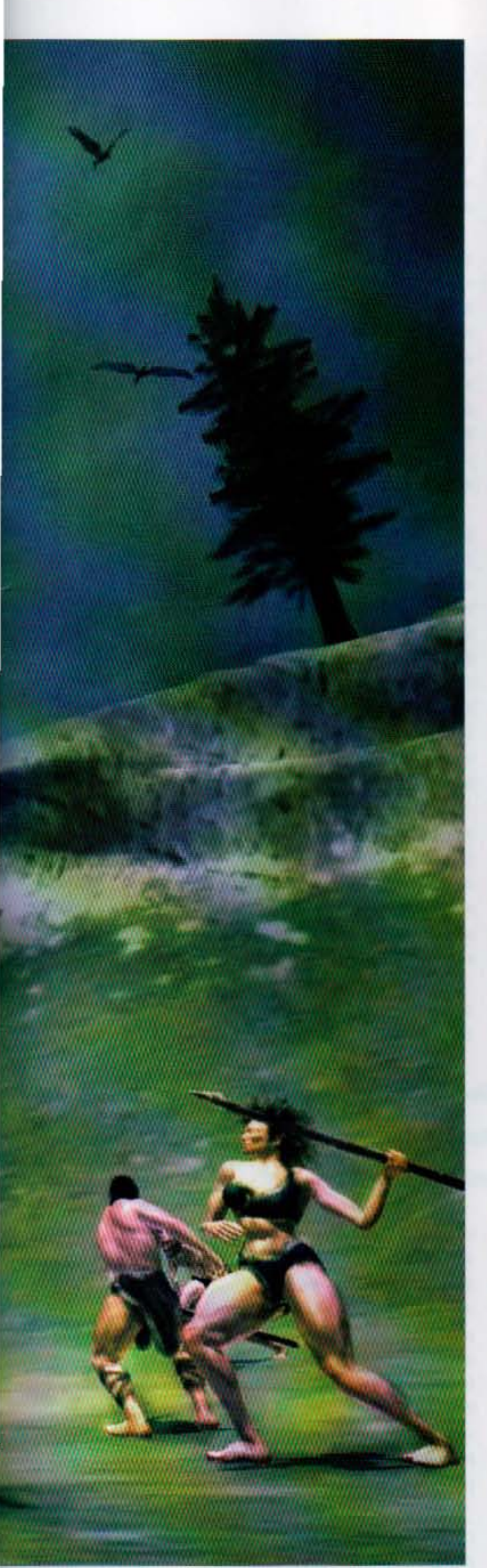


Games Workshop has a rather patchy track record when it comes to videogames based on its properties, so it's probably too early to properly judge this Warhammer 40K licence



BC

It may not be strong on prehistorical accuracy but BC is likely to fulfil all your Raquel Welsh-inspired fantasies. Edge goes on a journey of discovery and finds out just how much bite Intrepid's C-rex really has



"Natural history documentaries are horrible to watch," says **Ben Cousins**, self-confessed hardcore gamer and designer on *BC*, elegantly illustrating gore. "When a lion's taking down a little baby deer, biting its neck and its mother is freaking out in the background, it's horrible. And that's because it's real."

See, Bloodiest Game Ever (© Peter Molyneux, **E**111) might be a good tagline to capture attention – God knows Molyneux's good at that – but the visceral evisceration visible in *BC*'s prehistoric valley is more than just a gimmick. **Matt Chilton**, co-founder of Intrepid, explains: "I think it's going to be... ferocious, and... savage. The violence will be representative of the context, though."

"So a tremendously high level of violence, then?" interrupts Cousins.

"Yeah." Everyone laughs. "Because if you've got the world's largest, most ferocious predator, and he's hungry..."

"And as a consequence of us simulating that, *BC* will be violent."

"We hope people will recognise that it has a context."

Yeah, it's practically *educational*, affirms **Edge**, recalling a tyrannosaur biting a man in half, then shaking the torso like a ragdoll, staining the grass red-brown with a shower of blood.

"It'd be great to have it as part of an elementary school education course on the prehistoric world," agrees Chilton enthusiastically. "You know, wander round the forest, chase dinosaurs, see how it behaves."

Except dinosaurs never co-existed with cavemen, did they, points out pedantic **Edge**. Everyone chuckles.

- Format: **Xbox**
- Publisher: **Microsoft**
- Developer: **Intrepid/Lionhead**
- Release: **2004**
- Origin: **UK**



BC could well be the most savage game ever, if you'll forgive the pun. The simple user interface means you can get stuck right in



BC is The Caveman Game. You'll have seen it, albeit briefly, in **Edge**'s Inside... Lionhead feature last year, and again when it made its successful first public appearance at E3 2002. The player controls a tribe, the objective being to conquer five hub worlds that lead to the top of a mountain. This illustrates the tribe's dominance over the land and the other life that surrounds them; variously, insects, birds, mammals and dinosaurs. Lots of dinosaurs – herbivores, carnivores, passive and very, very aggressive, with sharp teeth and claws and the ripping and the tearing of flesh and oh...

It is fair to say it's somewhat more complicated than *Chuck Rock*. Each object in *BC*'s world has its own weight and flammability. Boulders roll, trees fall, branches combust. This is the most exciting part of the game, as far as **Edge** is concerned. Intrepid does not care how you get from point A to point B, or how you fell a two-storey dinosaur C-rex. It gives you the tools, the gravity, and the world, and then lets



"The aesthetics of the game are a slight caricature of reality," adds Chilton. "The same ethos applies to the AI models. It's real-world rulesets, with some artistic licence that places those rules in the context of what you'd naturally expect."

A vigorous nod signals agreement from the vocal Cousins. "I think that's really important. The creatures aren't just these things running at you. They might have a child they want to protect, or water they're scared of – they're more scared of water than they are of the cavemen, so they'll come for you rather than jump in the water. So you're setting up a much more interesting and creative environment for the player."

Time for an anecdote from lead AI programmer, **Thomas Busser**. "It causes some problems, though. I remember an example; the creatures learn from their experiences, so if you hit a simian at the right time – if you surprise it – it'll learn that humans are quite dangerous, and it won't fight back. Which isn't what we wanted at that point in the game, because simians are meant to be dangerous, and he was behaving like a coward. It makes tuning complex."

Cousins again: "I think that tuning's the only place game designers have any business with AI. What we want is the richest, most amazing AI possible, and then in tuning it we can create something that's much more interactive, immediate, and mainstream."

Emergent behaviour spawning from amazing AI, realistic physics and delicately constructed real-world

you play. But the problem with freedom is that sometimes it's confusing. Gamers demand choice, but they don't expect it – they look for linear objectives, linear solutions. Won't *BC*'s structure bemuse new gamers?

"I think the level of realism in the game makes it more accessible," disputes Cousins. "The hardcore gamers might see something and go, 'Oh, that bit of wall looks like it's going to move, so if I shoot that it's going to break,' just because it's not casting a light in a light map or something. But the novice is probably going to be a little bit more innocent, and will expect more. When I show the game to non-gamers, they're less impressed by the interactivity of the game than the hardcore gamers, because, well, they expect it."

So real-world logic proves more useful than arcane gaming knowledge? But how are gamers going to find the puzzles in the first place without giant *Crazy Taxi*-style arrows?

"There are two ways we direct them. If you imagine a huge hub level as a circle, with the camp in the centre, the important areas are all geographically striking in some way. The first time you stand in the middle of the level and look around you'll see, oh, a clump of trees in the middle of the desert, that might be an oasis, and up on the mountain there's a crack running through it with some pterosaurs circling nearby. Then, as the player runs around the world, we've got a text box system, so that when the player gets in a mission zone the name of the mission comes up."

Sounds fair en—

"Oh, and there's a map in the camp, as well," adds the designer, who's clearly thought this through once or twice. "When the tribe first arrives at the camp they make a map which is a sketch of the world. We put the camera in the middle of the map, so if you see an object on the map and lift the camera up, you'll see the object in the world."

Ah. Good.

The art of artificiality

To change tack for a moment: Intrepid has a dog, Eureka. Eureka has played in the office ever since she was a puppy. She's alert, hyperactive, attention-seeking, doing everything you'd expect a dog to do, only doing it much quicker – like a cartoon dog, like a videogame dog. She scampers around the office, paws coders, naps, plays, and naps again. She doesn't bite **Edge**, for which **Edge** is grateful. That creature AI, then. It's grounded in realism, sure, but is it possible to go too far?

"I think it's more a matter of making sure the reactions from the creatures are as realistic as possible, but faster than they are in real life, and maybe a little bit exaggerated. So where in the real world a creature may become hungry, and start thinking about food, and then get into quite a complex behaviour searching for it, what we want is for the player to throw food towards a raptor, and for it to eat it."

"I'd like some players to have killed everything in sight, and others to have been the sneakiest bastards possible, but as long as they enjoy themselves I really don't care"

environments – it's easy to lose sight of the fact that, at its core, *BC* is a thirdperson action adventure. The design's been influenced by *Mario*, *Jak and Daxter*, et al, and it shows in the simple controls ("We're not using the black and white buttons at the moment. If we do use them, we've failed. We want to use the four face buttons and the triggers, and that's it.") and, particularly, in the platform sections.

The concept is two-fold; first, that players have several tasks open to them at once, from object investigation, combination, and manipulation, through

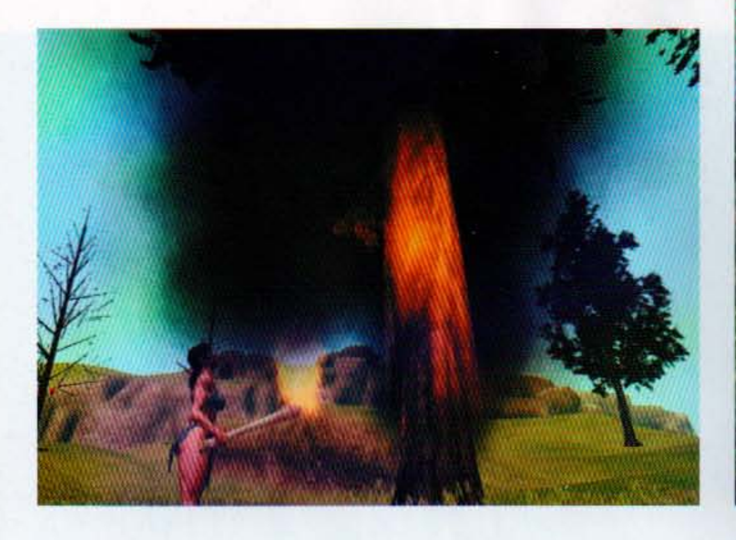






That old phrase 'emergent behaviour' crops up several times. Intrepid enthuses that *BC* will be "impossible to predict" and that there will be some surprises in store for gamers











The landscapes are not limited by the hardware, but by the speed of the player's movement. Unfortunately riding docile animals will not make the game but Intrepid wants to give the player freedom to travel to any of the hub worlds. And the game's objective? To reach the top of a hill, literally

squad-based projectile fights, right down to basic jump-from-here-to-here-to-get-there stuff. Don't want to test your head? Test your thumbs. Fed up with falling off ledges? Go spike herbivores, or go spear fishing in the luscious (soon-to-be plankton-filled) oceans.

Second, "It's all part of this concept of letting the player interact in a very simple way, but having such a detailed world that the richness comes from the way the world interacts with the player," says Cousins. "The complexity comes through layering, rather than having a button for every action in the game."

But don't you worry some gamers will miss the point? That *BC* won't be recognised as a lush, multi-layered, intelligent game, but instead become, 'that game where you stab dinosaurs'?

"I think that for some people it will be 'that game where you stab dinosaurs'. For me, that's a prescriptive approach – where the designer says, 'This is the game where you kill things,' or 'This is the game where you set fire to things.' I'd like some players to come out of this and to have killed everything in sight, and others to have been the sneakiest bastards possible, but as long as they enjoy themselves I really don't care."

Is there anything players won't be able to do that you would have liked to have implemented? There's a pause, as Chilton thinks of something "We've been fairly good at realising our ambitions..."

"Riding creatures, maybe," says Cousins. "I would have liked to have a class of docile creatures that we could ride or train. Then we could have made the world even bigger. The constraint on the size of the world is not hardware, it's the speed that the player moves at."

It's worth mentioning just how happy Intrepid is working on Xbox – and not just because of the hardware. It seems that Microsoft is the best sugar-daddy in the world: "Never mind it as a platform – I mean, it's a brilliant platform – but we wouldn't have Microsoft as a publisher [if we weren't working on Xbox], and they're so good," the designer enthuses. "If we were on PS2 we wouldn't have the backing that we have from Microsoft, with all the resources and enthusiasm."

Part of that support includes DVDs of Microsoft's external test department demoing *BC*, complete with close-ups of their hands and overlaid commentary illustrating every little fumble for the controls, every gaming misdirection. That's how they're building the UI: retrospectively, from player feedback. Also key to *BC*'s current (and potentially future) success is the support from Lionhead. "It definitely puts pressure on us in terms of quality control, but the advantage is that we get the benefit of their experience, and the guidance of Peter. And we share technology, and learn techniques."

And bitch?

"There's some internal competition," admits Chilton. "Which acts constructively, pushing us and allowing us to pursue more innovative aspects."

"If *Fable* didn't exist," says Cousins, "then we wouldn't be pushing as hard. I mean, who would want *that* as their competition? But you should see people here when we get builds, 'Nah, we can do better than that.'"

So, new tagline. As well as being The Bloodiest Game Ever, *BC*'s going to be Better Than *Fable*?

"Of course," says Chilton.

And if it's not?

"It will be, don't worry."

And if it's not?

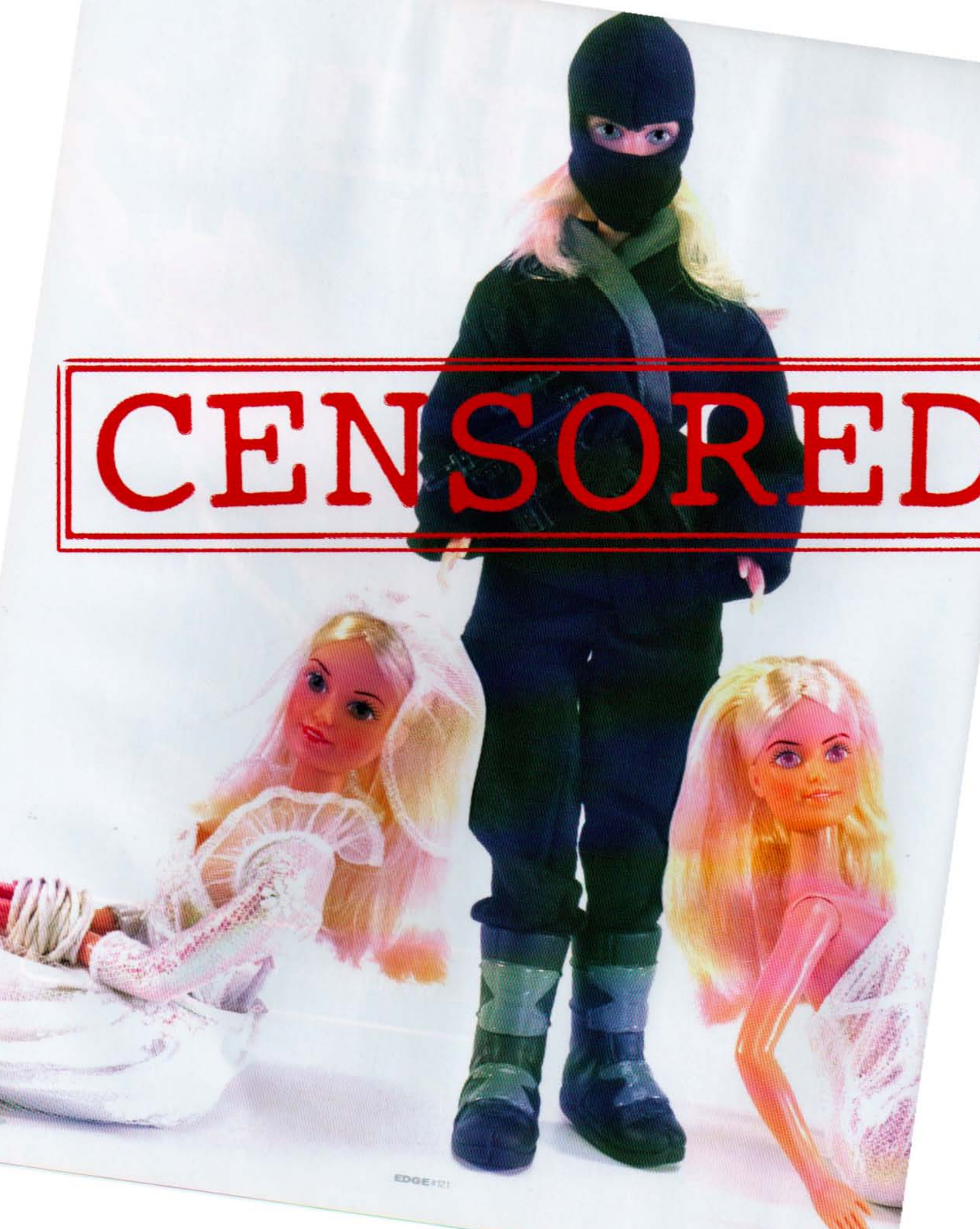
"We'll settle it with paintball."

And if it's not?

"If it's not, then our next product will be," closes Chilton.

Neat place to finish. Eureka barks, and **Edge** goes home. 




CENSORED

Digital Women: Desire and Loathing in the Videogame Industry

In 1996 Core Design introduced a female character that placed a bomb under the issue of gender in videogames. But what is the true legacy of Lara Croft? **Edge** asked women throughout the industry about gaming's complex relationship with girls. This is their response...

Generally females are portrayed in an overtly sexual way with huge breasts and ridiculously tiny waists. Fantasy as it may be, I find it disappointing that degrading and offensive images of female characters are still being promoted in games," **Andrea Griffiths**, then head of PR, Fox Interactive, **E**52, December 1997.

The above is from an **Edge** feature on women in games, published when the blossoming super stardom of Lara Croft prompted a rash of female lead characters. But this was no feminist uprising. Most developers focused on Lara's body image, attempting to 'out sex' her in terms of breast-size and salacious marketing. Few attempted to get to the core of her popularity, or understand her status as an action icon. The question is, has the industry gained any more insight over the last five years?







Pretty vacant? James Bond games have rarely featured strong female characters

Women as objects of desire

Take a cursory glance and it seems that attitudes have not moved on. Game advertising is still plastered with real or CGI babes, semi-clad, staring vacantly from the page. Designers still build in sexy, but non-playable female characters merely, it seems, to feature in the advertising. Furthermore, as visuals edge closer and closer to realism, the voyeuristic possibilities of games are intensifying. *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and *Private Dancer* both revel in the capacity of modern hardware to render the female form in lascivious detail.

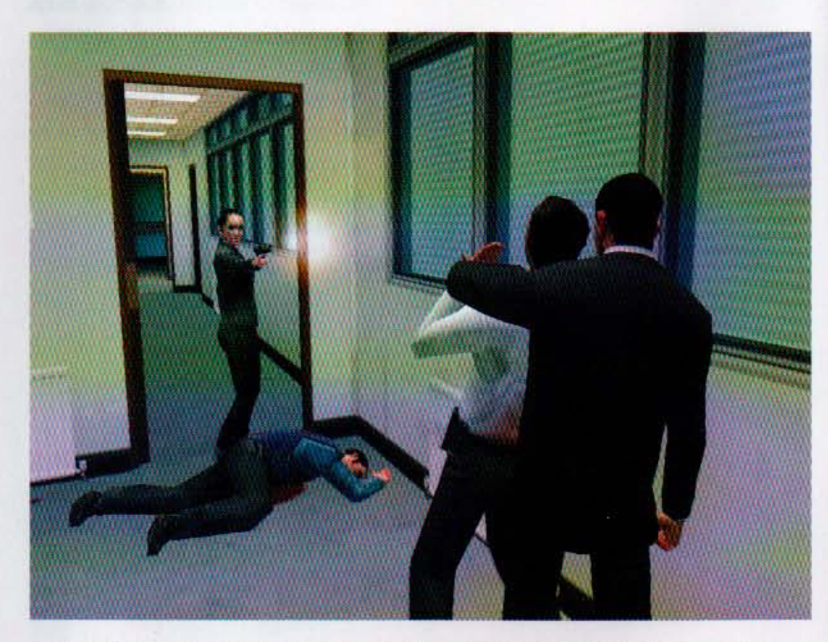
We shouldn't be surprised. As **Helen Kennedy**, a lecturer in cultural studies at the University of the West of England (currently writing a PhD on Gender & Computer Games) summarises, "The association between female sexualised bodies and masculine forms of technology is a dominant one, and has a long history. Games are no exception. The games business is very male-dominated and the marketing/advertising often draws from particularly adolescent fantasies of femininity, so it is little wonder that the results appear immature or overtly stereotyped."

But if we're not surprised, should we be alarmed or even ashamed by the likes of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*? **Edge** spoke to numerous women in the development community and the general consensus was – well, no, not really. To make a very obvious but important point, videogames are hardly alone here. From the voluptuous nudes of renaissance artist Titian, through Victorian peep-shows and '50s pin-ups, to today's manufactured pop starlets, women – much more than men – have continually been portrayed as objects of desire. Freud identified scopophilia – gaining sexual pleasure through looking – as a key component of male sexuality. In the '70s, Laura Mulvey wrote a seminal piece of film theory in which she applied Freudian analysis to Hollywood films, showing how and why men are consistently portrayed as active, rounded characters while women are merely passive objects of the male viewer's gaze. This situation is coded deep into our culture. If videogames are to be slammed for the objectification of women, they will have plenty of co-defendants.

In any case, it could be argued that most female game characters – however ridiculously fantasised – are actually challenging the 'women as passive sexual objects' cultural/media stereotype by simply *not* being passive. **Tanya Krzywinska**, a lecturer in Film and TV Studies at Brunel University (and co-editor of the book 'ScreenPlay: cinema/videogames/interfaces' – see p21) argues, "We must, as game theorists, be alert to the context of gaming and central to this, in terms of gender representation and its shifts, is the fact that female avatars are by virtue of gaming, media active. They're curious about their worlds and have virtual physical combat skills, which balances against the cyber-babe male fantasy."

Helen Kennedy takes this theme further, "There is plenty of evidence that women can and do identify with these strong, beautiful and sexy women. Indeed the juxtaposition of sexiness and power is potentially a very liberating one as girls and women are often taught to fear their sexuality and to see their bodies as problematic and endangered (or threatened by male sexual power)." This identification view is held by several of the development staff that **Edge** spoke to: **Luci Black** a producer at Creative Assembly joked, "As long as the pretty, big-breasted, scantily clad kickass characters are done well they appeal to women too, albeit for different reasons. If you're going to imagine yourself as a kickass babe in a chainmail bra it ain't gonna be an ugly one with a flat chest, is it?"

Context is vital. *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* has real charm – it's beautifully made, it's bright and funny, and let's face it, girls *do* play volleyball in bikinis. (Plus, some female consumers are bound to get a kick out of all that accessorising.) In



***The Getaway*'s Yasmin gives as good as she takes. The script was co-written by Team Soho's Katie Ellwood and a love interest was the last thing on the minds of the designers**



contrast, many find something intrinsically squalid about *BMX XXX*. The marriage of stunt gameplay to a *GTA*-style narrative of sex and sleaze is incongruous. It feels like marketing desperation, given falling sales across the extreme sports genre.

Acclaim's brand manager **Ben Fischbach**, makes a convincing case for the game, "According to research data, more than 50 per cent of the owners of next-generation hardware systems are males 18–34. We chose to infuse this game with mature humour and content that is reflective of the lifestyle of our audience. The mature content we added is in the vein of such movies as 'American Pie', 'Scary Movie' and 'Animal House', as well as national programs like 'The Howard Stern Show', all of which resonate with the core demographic of today's gamers. In fact, the type of content that we've added has been shown in feature films for the past 25 years."

Fair enough. But the three films mentioned were conceived from the foundations up as gross-out comedies – *BMX XXX* is gross-out comedy stapled haphazardly to a sports sim. Also, as Helen Kennedy suggests, "The film industry is much more mature now, and has achieved a level of cultural status (including its B-movie,

CENSORED

825 points

Many don't find Acclaim's *BMX XXX* offensive because of its content, it's because it was the result of a tawdry marketing plan

Helen Kennedy believes that videogames will continue to be perceived as immature if players are encouraged to kill working women outside of a more robust moral framework



***Primal*'s Jen is a new kind of female heroine: intelligent, strong, and more importantly, she has to save her boyfriend from the clutches of evil**

cult movie elements) which the games industry has yet to acquire." Indeed the videogame as sanctioned adult entertainment is still an embryonic concept and only brilliantly conceived standard-bearers such as *Vice City* are going to advance the cause. One day, the industry might well be mature enough to produce a Troma films-style cult game about a horde of topless BMX hookers, but it'll take something much better than *BMX XXX* to make it work.

And it will need to be surrounded by better role models. As **Laura Peterson**, assistant development manager at Codemasters External Studio concludes, "In my opinion, [*BMX XXX* is] as harmless as the 'Erotic Witch Project' and other stupid movies that plague the Blockbusters and HMV DVD shelves. Their sole purpose is to titillate, and nothing more. It shouldn't be a big deal, except unlike the motion picture industry, there aren't as many positive

"GTAIII reflects a troubling attitude towards sex workers which suggests that it's okay to abuse these people because they are less worthy of our empathy than other women"

Infogrames was on a tight budget with its *Grand Prix Challenge* ads, while *Dino Stalker* was just plain clichéd



portrayals of females to balance these types of titles. That's where I feel the problem lies."

Women as victims

Remember *Donkey Kong*? The damsel in distress, imprisoned and reliant on the heroic male for rescue, provided the archetypal female videogame character for many years. As narratives became more complex, that essentially childish fairy-tale scenario all but disappeared, but the status of women in games hasn't universally improved. In some ways the role of victim has merely been updated.

Take a look at the recent glut of crime capers – *GTAIII*, *Vice City*, *Hitman 2*, *BMX XXX*: here, women are predominantly placed in the roles of prostitutes, pole dancers and strippers. Of course, it could be argued that, as crime games, these titles naturally deal in the milieu of criminal sleaze – of strip clubs, drugs and violence. In this respect the women are in context. But the way in which these depictions are isolated in the marketing hype and press coverage is worrying. Almost every sniggering review of *GTAIII* mentioned the fact that you could have sex with a prostitute then beat her to death. What does this say about videogames, or their users?



Krzywinska, is an avid gamer and fan of visceral shooters, but this element concerns her. "Beating the prostitute, as with other aspects of the game, ties into dominant notions of masculinity and its representation, an aspect of the game that can't be denied – even if it is contextualised in terms of a supposedly bygone retro-masculinity. The '70s drug culture/gangster underworld context operates to sanction the player (of whatever gender) into doing what would be, in reality, for most, unconscionable." Kennedy, agrees, "I think *GTAIII* reflects a very troubling attitude towards sex workers which suggests that it is okay to abuse/kill/injure these people because they are somehow less worthy of our empathy/sympathy than other women. I think this attitude is pervasive in cultural



***The Getaway*'s Yasmin may be a powerful female lead, but many may question her worth in a game that is morally bankrupt from beginning to end**

generally and I hate to see it being reproduced in games. This is not to say that it will necessarily lead to more violence against women (which is an argument I have seen touted about) but it will do little to undermine the notion that gaming and game culture is an immature and adolescent art form."

No one wants to get overtly politically correct here, and there's no reason to ban or alter great games such as *GTA*. Black makes a very pertinent point in this respect, "My reaction to the beating up prostitutes thing in *GTA* was to laugh. It's so audacious. It's sick and it's wrong but in a way that's just frankly hilarious, like the torture scene in 'Reservoir Dogs'. It's only a game – I haven't identified with these women and the graphics are too crude to lend any reality to



What men want

Why do so many female characters look virtually identical? What is it that men find attractive about the Lara Croft template? Here are some possible answers from the worlds of psychology and psychoanalysis…

Large eyes

According to evolutionary psychology large eyes remind us of babies, to whom evolution has ensured we are naturally attracted – one of the reasons we look after them. Ipso facto, large eyes are attractive.

Full lips

Another theory of evolutionary psychology: men are genetically programmed to fall for young women as youth is associated with fertility. And, yes, full lips are associated with youth. Hence the popularity of collagen implants among middle-aged women.

Exaggerated waist-to-hip ratio

In 1987 Bobbi Low, director of the Evolution and Human Adaptation Program at the University of Michigan, published the following theory. Evolution has ensured that women between puberty and 35 tend to store fat on their hips and breasts rather than torsos, to give the impression of a wide pelvis and milk-filled mammary tissue, both of which are attractive to men (a wide pelvis means safer delivery for their children, more milk means they won't starve). At the same time, a thin waist fools the male into thinking that the large breasts and hips aren't the result of fat. For more information, read Matt Ridley's excellent book 'The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature'.

Guns

No not as phallic symbols – well, not in the generally understood sense. Freud's 'castration anxiety' theory suggests that men are deeply traumatised by the childhood realisation that their mother lacks a penis. This leads them to fear that they, too, may be castrated. Consequently, in adulthood, some begin to fetishise certain objects that can act as penis substitutes – high heels for example… or, perhaps, guns. Lara's twin pistols may also tie in with more general theories on the eroticisation of weapons.

"We were never really after a love interest or a romantic counterpart. Yasmin's a hard bitch who has nothing but contempt for men and she uses her looks to her advantage"

the scene. I wouldn't call it 'mysogynistic' either. The player can beat up and rob anyone they like in the game, not just prostitutes. If they wanna go around beating up and robbing prostitutes exclusively I reckon it says more about the player than it does the game itself." The concern is when less sophisticated developers make the connection between sexual violence and success and zero-in specifically on this element.

Black's final point, about the player's role in violence, is vital. Whatever it is that amuses people when James Bond slaps a female agent or when Ice Cube guns down another imaginary bitch, is creeping into the content of, and our response, to 'adult' games. This raises questions, as **Amy Henning** director of *Soul Reaver* at Crystal Dynamics asserts, "I do think we have a responsibility to consider the psychological impact of our medium, especially as games become more realistic, graphic and mature. With non-interactive media like film and television, the viewer can psychologically distance himself by choosing not to identify with the protagonist, or by classifying a disturbing film as edification rather than entertainment. In an interactive medium like videogames, the psychological lines are blurrier. Games haven't matured enough to be considered edifying, and the player can't distance himself from the protagonist's actions, because he's controlling the protagonist. Therefore when clubbing a prostitute to death in *GTA*, you have to reconcile the fact that you are choosing this act for entertainment alone."

Women as heroes

Away from big-breasted volleyball chicks and crack-addled streetwalkers, there have been signs, over the last five years, of maturation in the use of female characters. Most recently, Jen, the star of Studio Cambridge's forthcoming PS2 adventure, *Primal*, is a dark gothic lead who makes an important departure from the Lara Croft stencil. While Core ensured its character had no love interest, presumably so male gamers could fantasise themselves into that role, Jen has a boyfriend and a life – and what's more she's out to rescue *him*, a complete reversal of the old defenceless princess scenario.

"In terms of her personality and the type of character Jen is, we were clearly influenced by TV shows such as 'Buffy' and 'Dark Angel' – both of which have strong female leads with underlying supernatural powers," explains lead designer **Katie Lea**. "*Primal*'s lead artist (Mark Gibbons), [creative director] Chris Sorrell and me all wanted Jen to be an appealing, sexy character, but not sexist or sleazy. We definitely didn't want to create a Lara clone. Our game has quite a realistic graphical style, so a huge-chested caricature just wouldn't have worked anyway!"

The important thing here is that Jen takes elements from *female* characters: she isn't simply Indiana Jones with an extra X chromosome like Croft. Also, her comparatively rich biography separates her from the usual soulless fantasy women. *The Getaway*'s Yasmin, another in-house SCEE creation, is a similarly complex character – all the more intriguing for the fact that she's non-playable. "We wanted a femme fatale in the noir tradition," explains *Getaway* director **Brendan MacNamara**. "We were never really after a love interest or a romantic counterpart. She's a hard bitch who has nothing but contempt for men and she uses her looks to her advantage. She's inspired as much by 'The Maltese Falcon' as she is by 'Nikita' and 'Mona Lisa'." Again this character has had substantial female input (the script was co-written by Team Soho's Katie Ellwood), and her influences are women. Of course, for those familiar with Laura Mulvey's Freudian interpretation of the

femme fatale archetype – as a symbol of male fear and loathing of women – Yasmin raises some interesting questions. But enough about Freud...

Whatever advances have been made elsewhere, it's survival horror that clearly leads the way in terms of producing strong, non-exploitative female leads. *Biohazard*'s Jill Valentine, Claire Redfield and Rebecca Chambers, Miku in *Project Zero* and potentially Heather in *Silent Hill*, are undeniably attractive, but they don't ponce about in leather cat suits. They are practical and resourceful. And they 'kick ass'. This is an area where videogames really have the lead on films – in the horror film genre, women are often little more than pouting, screaming conduits for male aggression.

Furthermore, the fact that Konami has chosen to front its latest *Silent Hill* title with a girl symbolises willingness among the top developers to rely on strong female characters. Square, for example, has recently chosen to feature Yuna as the lead in *Final Fantasy*'s first true narrative sequel, *FFX-2*. In some ways the company has conformed to standard videogame maxims, making her much more raunchy for her lead role, as though women must have hot pants and bare midriffs to attract an audience. However, she also subverts standard thinking on female roles. Often, playable girl characters are there to provide a 'softer' alternative to the all-out fist-fighting action of the male. But *FFX-2* is very much an action-orientated RPG – indeed, it's the first *FF* title to include action sequences outside of the standard battle sections. And Yuna is in charge. It seems Square is a feminist operation.

On the subject of female alternatives to the standard male protagonist (who is



Whatever your views on Lara, her athleticism challenges the notion that female icons are passive sexual objects

Sisters are doing it for themselves

Women are now taking the creation of strong female characters into their own hands. As Helen Kennedy explains, "What is interesting is the ways in which female gamers have intervened in the game culture in order to provide their own characters with whom to identify, etc. There is evidence of women using game patches to insert female characters into games with male protagonists and online games which offer the opportunity to create your own 'skin' seem to be popular with female gamers – the female *Quake*-playing community for example features imagery drawn from a more extensive palette than that used by male game designers."

CENSORED



Top Girls

Edge asked a variety of industry women for their favourite female videogame characters. Here's a selection of their responses...

Fei Yin – Virtual On

"Although she isn't as powerful as the other mechs she's incredibly fast, so you can use her to run rings around the more cumbersome characters, plus her attacks become more powerful as she takes damage, which is a nice game mechanic."
Ana Marsh, lead designer, Acclaim Studios Cheltenham

Buffy – Buffy the Vampire Slayer

"Unlike Lara, she doesn't resort to the all too familiar game reliance on guns and other traditional weapon hardware, instead Buffy uses 'domestic' artefacts as weapons (such as brooms, shovels, water-pistol, etc). Buffy is also very vocal and more 'human' than Lara, who is both silent and coldly distant. Buffy also has a network of friends, unlike Lara, which makes her less of a traditional male hero in a ultra-female body."
Tanya Krzywinska

Alice – American McGee's

"Alice also tends to break the cyber-babe body-mould with her non-figure hugging Victorian style dress and sassy one liners."
Tanya Krzywinska

"I really enjoyed the game because of the character. She was smart, witty, and always up for a challenge. Emphasis was placed on how her mind works – not how her body jiggled. Despite the fact that some may find Alice's personality a bit on the dark (perhaps even morbid) side, Alice is just a wonderfully done character and her interaction with NPCs, her conversations, and out loud thoughts really brought this character to life for me."
Vangie 'Aurora' Beal, www.gamegirlz.com

Governor Elaine Marley-Threepwood – Monkey Island

"She is cute, she is silly, she is a governor and she is a feared pirate. What more can you wish for? Beside, she has married the love of her life."
Barbara Karolina Bernad

Rynn – Drakan

"Unashamedly hard as nails, nicely sharp and contemptuous attitude, looks great in armour and gets around on a dragon."
Luci Black

Celes – FFVI

"She was beautiful (according to Amano's manual art), she was a top military strategist, and she demonstrated integrity by turning against Kefka to help the group of rebels. She wasn't just a cold military genius; her emotions and desires often caused self-conflict. (She also had that cool Runic Blade which would absorb enemies' magic.) I feel that her wide palette of emotions and thoughts, as well as her good fighting skills and unique weapon, made Celes a wonderful character who was integral to both the story and the gameplay."
Laura J Peterson

Chun-Li – Street Fighter II: Turbo and Street Fighter Alpha

"Because her combos, especially Spinning Bird Kick, were unique and matched the other fighters', and she was one of the faster-moving fighters. By putting her in sneakers and a work-out suit in *Alpha*, Capcom showed that she didn't just have to be a cute babe in a costume. Her history, dating back to her father's murder and her relentless quest to avenge his death, makes her fiercely noble and therefore interesting."
Laura J Peterson

Lara Croft – Tomb Raider

"Due to the influence she has had on the games industry and the general public's view of this industry. Although her character was designed for a male audience, due to the rise of 'grrrl power' in the early-'90s, *Tomb Raider* made a surprising appeal to casual female gamers as Lara's character was portrayed as an independent, strong, butt-kicking babe."
Rebecca Parnell





Sony hopes that *Primal*'s Jen will tap into a generation raised on 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' and other embodiments of female empowerment

"If we broaden the ways people can interact with our gameworld and our environment and our characters, I think we'll inevitably attract more women"

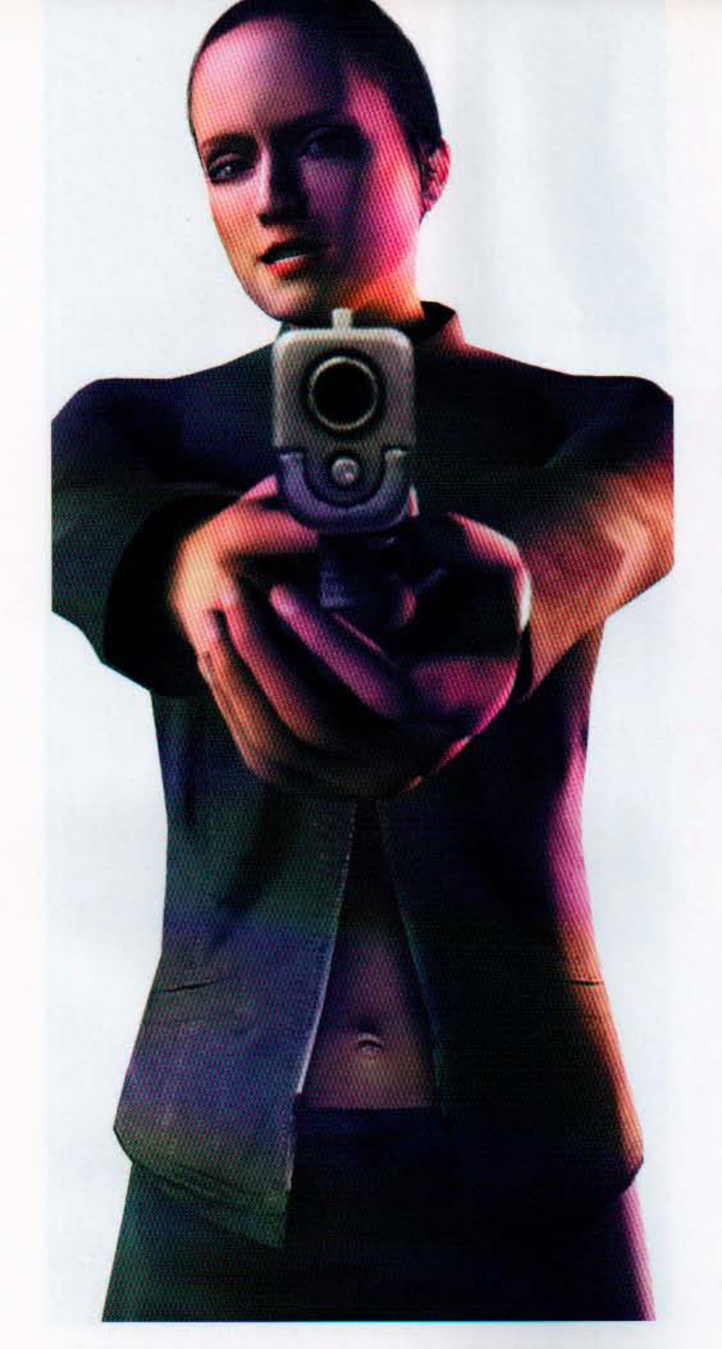
identifiable and aspirational to gaming's core audience – young males – and is therefore still seen by many publishers as indispensable), there have been concerns that this practice could be marginalised as technology moves on. **Aurora** from gamegirlz.com sums them up. "I'm afraid we're stuck mainly with male heroes because developers would be doubling their production costs to create choices of male or female leads. This requires two voice actors *and* two scripts as NPCs wouldn't interact the same with a male character as they would a female characters." However, the very fact that key developers are prepared to include female alternatives, despite extra production costs and hassles is a positive sign: *Devil May Cry 2*, *Biohazard Zero* and *Deus Ex II* all feature female leads.

For some studios it's about the different sexes offering different gameplay experiences and emotional resonances (the survival horror experience just feels different when you're controlling a teenage girl rather than a spec-ops testosterone machine). For others its about offering an avatar to identify with – whatever the sex of the player: as **Warren Spector** told **Edge** last year, "One of the things we really wanted to do in *Deus Ex* was provide a female player character, so women will have someone they relate to as they play through how ever many hours of gameplay. In *Deus Ex II* we *are* going to offer that. And if we broaden the ways people can interact with our gameworld and our environment and our characters, I think we'll inevitably attract more women, and then it becomes easier to recruit women in development, and then it becomes easier to figure out what women want. If that's possible." And on that subject...

Women as gamers

In **E**110, **Edge** ran a feature entitled 'Minority Report', looking into why the games industry has failed to cater for those outside the young straight male demographic – including a huge majority of women. The feature identified several explanations: young girls still aren't encouraged to interact with technology, publishers have no clear avenues for advertising to women, games feature too few positive female characters and not enough women go into game design. All of these are interlinked in an abstruse web of Catch 22s and vicious circles, and no one **Edge** spoke to seemed sure of a solution.

Clearly women are still a minority in the games industry, but things *are* improving. Five years ago, **Edge** had difficulty finding just a couple of female development staff to interview. For this feature, each of the dozen or so studios **Edge** approached had senior female designers and/or producers. And going by the staff **Edge** has spoken to, the industry is listening. **Amy Henig** points out, "I've been in a leadership role for the last ten years, working within senior management and leading male-dominated teams as a





Capcom's marketing team had an uninspiring day. The message here is that teenage boys would much rather worship a cel-shaded car than a Page 3 model. How naive is that?

creative director. As the director, it's my job to get my creative opinions across in this environment, and I've never found it to be an issue." **Rebecca Parnell** an audio designer at Criterion Games continues, "At VIS while I was working on *State of Emergency*, there was at one point no design for female gang members and so I argued strongly for there to be. They did take heed and got others discussing the issue, with the result being that half the China Town gang ended up being female." Meanwhile **Shawnee Sequeira**, development director at Small Rockets, sees the influence going much further, "Women are helping to balance out a lot of areas that are unhealthy in the games sector: attitudes, working hours, communication, teams, efficiency, overall perception, etc. And this is a good thing given the current climate in the industry – perhaps it's the type of change we really need."

But would an increase in female development staff make a huge difference to the way women are portrayed in games? "It is not always evident that this will indeed be the case," asserts Kennedy. "This is known in some academic circles as the genital credential fallacy – ie just because you are a woman you will somehow make better, less oppressive images of women. I think film and television tell us that this is not always true. Also, there is the tricky issue of the role of fantasy in the production of these images of women. It seems just as likely that a female designer might fantasise about having a very feminine body as well as being very powerful, etc." Krzywinska concurs, "Not all women have the same interests and we are slightly in danger here of proposing that all games created by women would be nurturing and morally conservative." **Barbara Karolina Bernad**, an animator on *Hitman 2*, adds a commercial angle, "All professionals, including girls, are interested in selling games. As long as 14-year-old boys are the main target – why change?"

"The industry needs to start exploring beyond traditional male demographics. Investment in female consumers today will yield enormous dividends in a few years"

The appearance of a few more fully rounded characters has to be desirable, though – even if it's just to provide an alternative to the Page 3 models for those potential gamers who aren't 14 and aren't male: quite a large demographic, really. Kennedy feels that, even if women designers can't necessarily come up with better female characters, they can at least bring a wealth of new influences and experiences, "All that we can hope for is greater diversity and complexity in the representation of women. The more women designers the greater the cultural repertoire from which images can be drawn."

Peterson adds a prophetic conclusion. "I think having more women involved in the games industry will have a positive impact on the future creation of female characters, but this must occur alongside changes to

the overall expectations our society has about the relationship between girls and technology. The industry needs to have the guts to start exploring beyond traditional male demographics when it comes to selling games. Smart investment in female consumers today will, in my opinion, yield enormous dividends in a few years, and it will help make the games industry ever more sophisticated and diverse as it matures."

This is the overriding message. There *have* been advances in the representation of women. Since the tailing off of Lara fever over the last couple of years, very few developers now believe that a big-breasted lead character is a guaranteed meal ticket. And more recently, the reportedly poor sales of *BMX XXX* should send out a message that you can't just slap a few hookers on a BMX franchise and fool the kids into thinking it's dangerous *GTA*-style entertainment. Some studios have even been motivated by taste rather than commercial factors, choosing to consult their female staff and construct rounded, interesting characters.

And yet, as graphics hardware becomes ever more capable of rendering mega-polygon babes, the temptation will be there to exploit the medium – sex sells and it always will. Fine. There's nothing wrong with a little titillation. But until the industry can match every hateful Jordan clone with a well-thought out Claire Redfield, we'll remain in the quagmire of adolescence. A horrifying fate.

Edge has only been able to print a fraction of the interviews it undertook with development staff and academics while researching this feature. For full transcripts, please visit www.edge-online.com

Femininity vs Androgyny: A modern paradigm

How do developers avoid creating another hopelessly adolescent game babe? Two popular characters show highly contrasting techniques. Cate Archer of *No One Lives Forever* is overtly feminine – unlike Lara Croft who is essentially a male hero in an exaggerated female body. Archer's clothing is chic and sexy while Lara wears sexless desert boots, vest and shorts. Also, Archer clearly has a hairstyle, while the (male) designers of Lara avoid the whole issue with a ponytail. Talking about avoiding the whole issue, Samus Aran side steps the minefield of sexist representation, by donning androgynous body armour. Crafty.



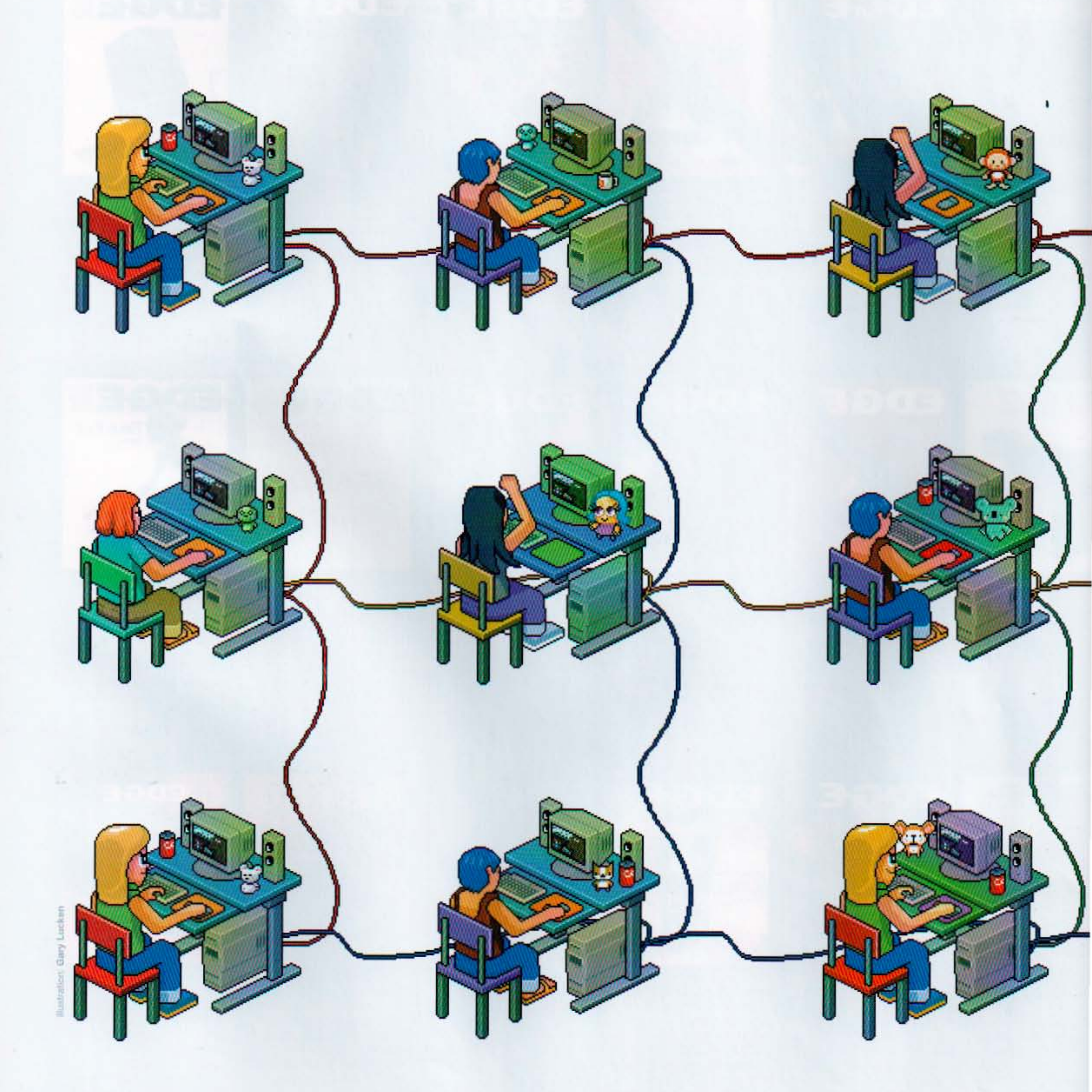
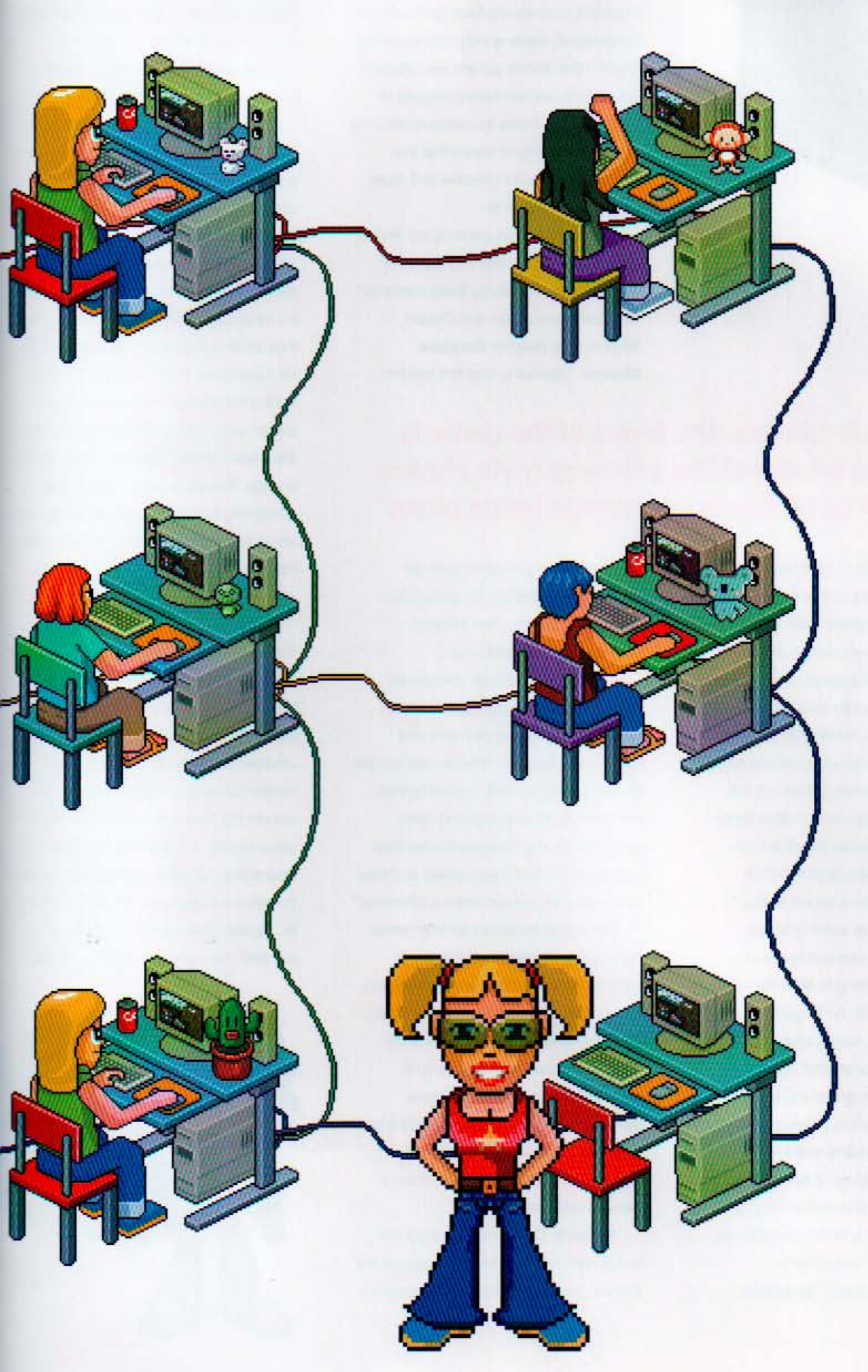


Illustration: Gary Lucken

Girl online

Women are chipping away at the tough exterior of videogaming and finding a voice in massively multiplayer roleplaying games (MMRPGs). **Edge** discovers how



There has been a hiccup in the game space continuum. An alien race has infiltrated the fabric of digital entertainment, and that race is changing the course of computer-aided interaction... forever.

These women have added new dimensions to the way games are played. A reported 50/50 split in a bestselling MMRPG like *EverQuest* makes it difficult to believe that the 'fairer' sex isn't having an effect. But women playing videogames? Won't that crack their nail polish?

Edge welcomes this female presence. By their very existence, electronic entertainment is taking a turn for the better. Face it, *Halo* wouldn't be the event it is without cooperation. *Dancing Stage* wouldn't exist. There'd be no *Samba De Amigo*, no *Super Monkey Ball*. Games are becoming more social, more complex. More, dare it be said, feminine.

"The invisibility of female gaming is a product of the general gender dynamics of public gaming rather than a verifiable lack of interest by females in computer games," explains **Dr Joanne Bryce** in 'Killing Like A Girl: Gendered Gaming and Girl Gamers'



Visibility'. MMRPGs in particular have attracted female gamers because, in extraordinarily simplistic market-speak, women like chat, women like shopping, women like meeting people and making friends. MMRPGs offer all of the above, in the private sphere. "MMRPGs have the opportunity to become the ultimate social software where people gather in small groups to get things done," offers **Emily Newton Dunn**, games pundit and ex-*Phantasy Star Online* addict. "I think women can only be a benefit to that."

Women from all walks of life are abandoning chat rooms in favour of roleplaying. According to **Nick Yee**, author of 'Codename Blue: An Ongoing Study of MMRPG Players', such games offer the same opportunities as chat rooms, but with purpose. "For female players, the focus of the game is in building relationships, and killing mobs is something you can do while chatting, whereas for male players the focus on the game is in killing mobs, and chatting is something you have to do to coordinate battle plans," he explains.

The more talk, the more things get done – as evidenced by the high proportion of women in guild-leader positions – and the more things get done, the more interesting the game becomes.

Female-generated relationships have not only altered quest designs but have created a more touchy-feely atmosphere in the previously sterile world of online gaming. The fact that female gamers are talking to one another and are forcing leagues of socially abrupt males to communicate on a more emotional level means that the environment is more cohesive and more welcoming to log on to.

"I personally have gained good friends from the MMRPG I play, and enjoy the game far more for having these contacts," says *EverQuest* addict and *Dragon Empires* level designer **Georgina Stephen**. "Spending time in a position of authority in my in-game guild did help with my previous occupation as a teacher," she offers, "and indeed it added to my self confidence."

"For female players, the focus of the game is in building relationships, whereas male players use the chat facility to coordinate battle plans"

"MMRPGs are a safe, therapeutic environment where people are able to work out their real-life problems and issues," explains Yee. "People with low self esteem can temporarily overcome their own fears by playing a powerful and competent avatar. People who feel they lack control of their lives can feel as if they were in control and can make a difference."

But online games are far from simple digital group therapy. Certainly those aspects exist but if that was all there was, action-seeking men and women would shrink away faster than a slug at a salt mound. The men would move on to something more bloody, and those women who aren't the *Counter-Strike* type would simply slink back to their offline gatherings, thus reopening the chasm between Mars and Venus.

Ragnarok Online somehow got the recipe right, because the population of the Korean, comics-inspired multiplayer online community started out almost wholly female. As **Peter Tyson**, community liais manager of *Dragon Empires*, explains it: "The game's success is largely attributec to boys picking the game up so they cou hang with more girls." So, add a dash of 'communal interaction', throw in a bit of 'text-based user-to-user communication a pinch of pink and some good old-fashioned masculine desperation and you've got ladies' night at the server.

Here in the west, however, thanks to Lara Croft-centred advertising the averag girl on the street is more likely to think tha computer games are boys' toys than to stop and consider trying out a double life spell-casting or defeating tides of orcs fo themselves. The blame can only be place on male-dominated companies doing wh they've always done – making those toys for those boys. Without female influence behind the scenes, bringing their own certain something to the design and plot there won't be any pavement-level attitu change. There's certainly enough fear mongering to make a good girl think twic about heading into the testosterone-hea interactive unknown.

'Virtual rape'

The well-documented 1993 'Village Voic article, 'A Rape In Cyberspace', exposec the 'virtual rape' of two women in a multi user domain by 'Mr Bungle' and made virtuality as unsafe as reality. However, modern times and modern firewalls prevent this kind of disgrace from cloudir game worlds. According to *EverQuest* G **Sharodika**, "Virtual sexual assault can o be verbal in *EverQuest*. You have no righ to… proffer sexually explicit abuse at any time. Your account can be banned."





MMRPGs are about to go supernova in terms of popularity – or at least that's what publishers are banking on. Codemasters' *Dragon Empires* (top) is a high-profile example on the horizon. *Phantasy Star Online* (above), meanwhile, represents a more simplified online roleplaying option on consoles





resilience," she comments. "Believe me, male players are just as abusive to other male players. The key is not to see that abuse is just being directed to you because you're 'female', it's more likely to be just because you're 'there'. Being female is just an easy target for the unintelligent and witless."

Open hostility – not harassment – may be male gamers' attempts to welcome

"Some women have to leave games and re-enter with male identities due to harassment and references to their appearance in real life"

The 'Mr Bungle' example is obviously an extreme one. Still, girls have to put up with a lot of sexually explicit language if they seek a bit of escapism. "Female players are treated better but are given less respect, so it's a double-edged sword," says Yee. "Some people are extra nice and give me rare weapons," explains Newton Dunn, but, as Helen Kennedy has observed in her research on gender representations in games at the University of West England, "[Some women] have to leave and re-enter using a male identity due to persistent harassment and incessant references to how they might look in real life."

Sexual harassment isn't big, nor is it clever. Women generally don't go online to date men. Treat them like normal people and you'll have an involving and exciting environment that stimulates interesting gameplay. Continue acting like 11-year-olds and you'll ruin it for everyone.

PC gamer and journalist **Rhianna Prachett** is more pragmatic. "Both male and female players have to develop

females into their unusual cult. It's playground antics as long as it's kept above the belt, and many women can handle it, though perhaps losing a touch of their femininity along the way.

Asheron's Call's Elysan Legacy allegiance founder **Kim Gonzales** admits: "I like logging in as male characters when I'm in a foul, aggressive mood because that's more tolerated among men than it is

among women. If a woman is feeling mouthy and peevish she's a bitch. If a man is acting mouthy and peevish it's somehow macho." Newton Dunn has seen a whole other kind of animal: "I've encountered several 'females' who were blatantly blokes posing as girls in an effort to flirt their way to free weapons, and because women online are more of a rarity than men, when they come face to face they tend to be mistrustful and a touch territorial."

Catty antics aside, **Edge**'s index finger hovers expectantly over the left mouse button. The more female players, the more females in the industry, and the more female-friendly elements in-game attracting more female gamers. Just think, more girls to talk to. **Edge** thinks it's time you got in touch with your feminine side. Roleplay if you must, but women gamers are here to stay.

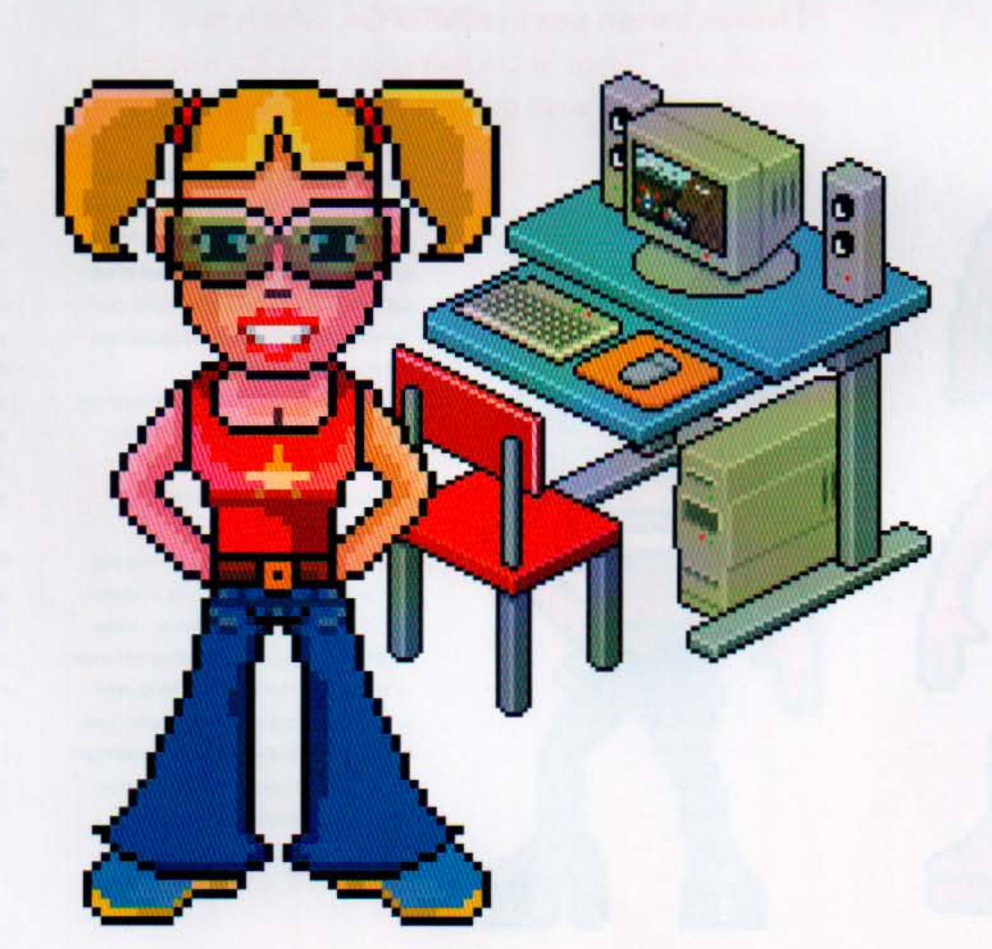

Continued >



Georgina Stephen, Kim Gonzales and Dr Joanne Bryce: three women whose activities in the massively multiplayer roleplaying scene show a changing landscape for videogaming in the 2000s



As the most widely established MMRPG, *EverQuest* has proved the sampling ground for thousands of female gamers, who've used it to build far-reaching networks of friends



Interview

Julian Fibbell is the author of 'A Rape in Cyberspace' and a visiting Fellow at The Center for Internet and Society, Stanford Law School

'Rape in Cyberspace' opened a lot of people's eyes to online sexual assault. What happened?

One of the users of the LambdaMOO game used a voodoo programme within the world that made it look like the victims were performing sex acts they weren't performing. How much you read that as a sexual assault depends on how emotionally involved you are in that world.

How did it make the victims feel?

Have you never been enraged or reduced to tears by an email you've received? Given that it's bits and bytes, you have room to take it seriously or not, but there's no controlling or predicting how you'll feel. It's not the same as being physically assaulted, but some were very upset, some were in tears afterwards, some were just annoyed, and some just laughed it off.

How can you validate the word 'rape' for something that exists only in virtuality?

It's an obviously controversial choice of words. Nowadays I'd not insist on the word 'rape' for what happened. Then, it was chosen because it made certain sense in that context.

I don't see it used in other contexts any more. I've never seen it in AOL chat rooms where you get unwanted sexual advances all the time.

Why can't virtual worlds be considered a "kind of emotional laboratory experiment," as 'Mr Bungle' assumed?

Like the attitude, 'Get over it. It's not real. We can just experiment around and there are no effects'? These people want to say get a life, grow up, but it's them who don't understand that there are real people and real emotions in there.

Since 1993, the virtual environment has grown up into a living, persistent world.



"I haven't seen sex in MMRPGs, which is surprising. There is coupling up, but it's not the sleazefest that was going on at LambdaMOO"





How common is online sexual assault nowadays?

I poke my head into chat rooms now and then and I see what goes on, but I haven't kept track of it as a phenomenon. I know what human beings are like offline so I know it's happening. The tools that 'Mr Bungle' had at his disposal were very specific tools. You won't see sexual assault or harassment performed as a rape now because those tools aren't so handy any more.

Does it happen in MMRPGs?

I haven't seen sex at all in these games, which is surprising. There have been game marriages and people couple up but it's no[t] been the sleazefest that was going on under the surface at LambdaMOO.

As far as economic equivalent of rape, it happens all the time with people hacking other people's accounts and in-game operations that allow you to cajole people out of their money.

How can women in MMRPGs go about protecting themselves?

There are tools for ignoring people who are getting obnoxious and there's emotional mental preparation. Be aware that this kind of thing can happen and that it's not going to kill you or devastate you. If you think it through beforehand you won't be caught off guard.

GAME GIRL


ALES THEA
London
FULL MONTY
2002 15:
TIFFANY & CO.
GAME BOY ADVANCE

ADVANCE

Recent reports suggest that the male stranglehold over the videogame industry is beginning to loosen. Edge profiles the girl gamers that have always avoided living in someone else's five o'clock shadow



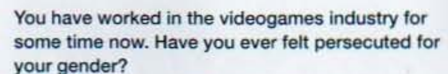
This is a man's world. Or is it? In its 2000-2001 report, the Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) reported that 60 per cent of all Americans (approximately 145m people) play videogames. The same consumer study shows that 43 per cent of these gamers are women. That's over 65m female players in the US alone. AOL's recent Games Channel Research and Demographic report showed that of the 5.5m unique users of its gaming channels every month, 61 per cent are female. In early 2001 the sales intelligence provider PC Data, collecting online data from the US, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Italy and Taiwan found that women comprise 50.4 per cent of online gamers and that they typically favour gambling, card games, and online quiz and trivia games. Apparently we were all wrong. Girls play games too.

Journalist Karlin Lillington claimed in her 2001 article in the 'Guardian' that women don't like playing games. She offers one explanation: most women play games for which they pay little or nothing. They will admit to playing videogames in surveys but this bears no relation to how they spend their cash. The reasons for this are manifold: playing online at work and school or enjoying their male partner's or friend's games are legitimate ways to dabble in gaming without incurring the scorn of their contemporaries.

If this is true it throws up a chicken and egg debate for the marketing men: do publishers aim games at men because girls won't buy games or is it because they aim games at the male demographic that girls don't buy games? And who's going to take the risk to find out? Either way there is a huge section of active gaming human beings from whom the developers and publishers of this world don't take a penny.

The Center for Digital Imaging and Sound near Vancouver has a novel solution: positive discrimination. The institute is proud that it is offering ways into the industry exclusively for women. Many games could do with a feminine touch, it believes and is offering £14,000 in Girl Gamer Scholarships to encourage girls and women to enter the game industry. There are those who dare to differ. These feminine movers and shakers will be the ones to bring about a cultural shift. So **Edge** felt it apt to profile some diverse girl gamers who have, and are, grabbing the industry by its balls.

Continued >



Violet Berlin established the first weekly videogame reviews to appear on TV (BskyB, 1990), and the first regular videogame column in a broadsheet newspaper ('Observer',1992). She has written for trade and specialist press, as well as mainstream games magazines on a regular basis for 12 years. In addition she has conceived, written, formatted and presented a plethora of TV shows about videogames. Despite all this, men still often ask her: so, do you actually play games? She doesn't think she'd undergo such incisive questioning if she had a penis.

Name: Violet Berlin.
Age: Don't you know it's rude to... 34.
Nationality: British.
Occupation: Broadcaster.

Skills: Video and audio editing, producing, writing, presenting, audio recording, DVCam operating... and putting on a frilly apron and dusting the set.

Hobbies: Have given birth twice in the past two years, and, in between nappy-changes, written, produced and presented 40 half-hour episodes of 'Game-Pad'. So, these days the only thing I do that has absolutely no bearing whatsoever on making videogaming TV shows or bringing up babies is sleeping. Can I say sleeping is my hobby?

First videogame: A few Game & Watches as a teenager. I didn't really visit arcades much as I was intimidated by lads around the machines. My first home console game was *Castlevania* on NES.

Consoles: US SNES, Virtua Boy, old-style Game Boy, Japanese Game Gear; Neo-Geo Pocket, US N64, Dreamcast. I own all the current consoles more than once (UK version and international versions). So, no need to go out. Ever. Again. An important consideration if you give up all known stimulants to have babies.

Preferred genres: I'm open to most genres but, as a general rule, any quirky Japanese title will really get my attention. Odd adventures, Bemani, communication games, whatever... I hate predictability. I prefer my videogames to be ingenious, with little gameplay twists and turns that your mind can enjoy as well as your fingers. Party games and sports games are less likely to ensnare me, as I'm more of a solitary than a social player.

Favourite videogame: I don't have one single favourite game. It depends on my mood. The most significant game in my life was probably *Zelda* on the NES. Over time, and series updates, I've probably spent as much of my life in Hyrule as I have in... er, where are we?

Least favourite videogame: *Tomb Raider*. I found the controls awkward, the enemies uninspired, the atmosphere lacking and the puzzles basic. I think it just turned up at the right time, with the right marketing, and became a lot of people's first adventure game.

Have you ever been annoyed by representations of women in videogames? If so what and why?
Tomb Raider bugs me because suddenly lots of people were seriously insisting that girls were now getting valid representation in games. Only in the sense that car manufacturers once draped glamour models over their vehicles, I pointed out. However, for the games industry, having the CG glamour model in there at all was enough to be deemed female representation. But she's a strong female role model. Have a pin-up in there if you want, that's fine, just don't tell me it's a feminist gesture. Anyway, there are plenty of male stereotypes in games too. I guess that by now I expect games to be aimed at blokes, and am just very pleased when characters like Samus Aran and Ulala do their own thing (in every sense).

You have worked in the videogames industry for some time now. Have you ever felt persecuted for your gender?
Yes, actually. On one occasion in particular, I was sitting at a table at a big games exhibition waiting to meet somebody, and a group of maybe six or seven blokes sat down next to me and started on me... everything about me, my clothes, my looks, what could I possibly know about games, etc. I was really shocked. It doesn't happen much, but I do feel that as a women in a male industry, people are naturally suspicious of why you're there.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for women by other women?
I don't think it's other girls that make them socially unacceptable. None of my female friends has ever had a problem with my playing games, and will play them quite happily with their boyfriends. The difference is that, unlike guys, they wouldn't go out of their way, or spend money to get the games. More women in development would eventually result in more must-have games for girls.

We are perhaps the first generation of gamers who are bringing up young children. Have your gaming habits changed at all since you bore children?
Up to a couple of years ago, I used to have weeks where I did nothing but play games all night then get up at four in the afternoon and start playing again before I even got dressed. Now I'm up at 6am with babies, and living a very structured life because of them, so I can't just drop everything and live a game for a block of time. If I didn't play videogames as part of my job, I would have had to give them up for lack of time. As it is, I don't expect to get involved in any MMRPGs or anything similar, as I simply don't have the large uninterrupted blocks of time necessary. I expect things to get easier when they're boys rather than babies.

Will you bring up your children to be gamers?
I'm planning their games education very carefully, and it will probably all begin with *Mario Paint* on the SNES, and then that NES game which you use in conjunction with the Miracle Piano Keyboard. My boys will begin with educational games, but at least they will be cool, retro educational games. However, I will limit their time playing/make them complete one game before they go onto the next while they're still young. They've got to have *something* to rebel against.

Does your children's exposure to generally negative representations of women in videogames worry you?
Not especially, as there's far more damaging stuff on the Internet, or even in magazines. In the light of this, the furore over *BMX XXX* is patently ridiculous. I'm actually more concerned about the murder, maim, death, hit and kill element of games. I'm so steeped in videogame culture myself that I find stuff like the healthy clunk of a reloading shotgun deeply satisfying, but only in the context of a game. I'll keep any violent games locked away until I'm sure they understand that the only place for violence is in cartoons, comics and games, and not in the real world.



Reiko Kodama

The Phantasy Star

Working on design and graphics for Sonic Team on such early classics as *Sonic* and *Phantasy Star*, **Reiko Kodama** entered the world stage in earnest with her seminal RPG *Skies of Arcadia*. **Edge** wonders if things are really that different for the lady gamer in the land of the rising sun.

Name: Reiko Kodama.
Age: 39.
Home: Yokosuka.
Nationality: Japanese.
Occupation: Producer.

Hobbies: Soccer, books (Reading: Bernard Cornwell's 'Sharpe's Adventures'), films.

The first game you played: *Block Kuzushi* in the arcade (a *Breakout* clone).

"There is a need to create themes, graphics and systems that appeal particularly to women. More female creators would bring new ideas and facilitate attracting a wider female audience"

Consoles: I own the following systems: Famicom, Super Famicom, Master System, Mega Drive, PSone, Dreamcast, PS2, GBA, GameCube.

Preferred genres: RPGs.

Favourite videogame: *Final Fantasy IV*. The power of its scenario and depth of characters invigorated my imagination to an incredible level.

Which games have you produced?
Although I've worked on many of Sonic Team's games I was sole producer of Saturn's *Deep Fear*, *Eternal Arcadia/Skies of Arcadia* for Dreamcast and, of course, *Eternal Arcadia Legend* for GC.

How many hours do you play games per week?
When I first receive a game and begin to discover and explore its intricacies I will easily play for three or four hours a day.

What was the last title you bought?
A western import title called *The Two Towers*.

Which female lead characters in videogames do you respect?
I respect many female lead characters. Lulu of *Final Fantasy X* particularly impresses me.

Have you ever felt persecuted for working in the videogames industry because of your gender?
I have never felt such thing. Of course, I can't speak for other female creators in the industry. As a female creator, I have never experienced any discrimination or disgraceful behaviour towards me at all. This may be because I'm single so I have never had to deal with getting married and having a baby to take care of while working.

Do any of your female friends ridicule you? Do any join with you in playing?
As far I know, I don't think people have such ideas about me, or my work. Having said that, I'm often questioned by people about the content of my work, as it looks very interesting and different from the usual definition of what Japanese do to make a living. I never really play games with friends but I do have some who like videogames and we exchange info on titles.

Have you ever converted a fellow female to gaming?
I have never influenced anyone to become a hardcore gamer. But lots of my close female friends have taken a great level of interest in my work and so started to buy a few games.

How acceptable is it for women to play videogames in Japan?
I don't think it is a problem of gender. Everyday I witness both men and women enjoying games. Japanese society disapproves more of those who play too much and neglect the other key elements of everyday life, such as, relationships, sleeping and eating.

What proportion of Japanese videogame players are females?
I think, on average, there are between ten and 20 per cent of females playing videogames in Japan. It all depends on the genre: you may actually get more than 20 per cent if you studied the RPG, horror and adventure genre demographics.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for women by other women?
I fervently believe there is a need to create themes, graphics and systems that appeal particularly to the female user. I don't currently have precise ideas but to achieve that, I think it would be great to have more female creators in the industry. They would bring new ideas and would facilitate attracting a wider female audience.

In your game *Skies of Arcadia* you assembled a primarily female team. Was this a conscious decision and, if so, why?
I never intended the development team to be comprised mostly of female members and this is still not my intention now. But thinking about it, looking back into my games career, I sense I've always had the need to impress the feminine touch as often as possible. I think this makes my games appeal beyond the hardcore gamers to a much wider audience. So in that sense, it may look like there are more female creators in my team than normal. I try to build games that everybody, including myself, would enjoy.

How do male friends outside the videogames industry view your videogames habits?
I think I would need to ask them! I think they see me not exclusively involved in game development. I believe they see it as one aspect of my life; one aspect I fulfil with all it requires in terms of hard work. Indeed, they also feel like this is not simply fun but requires a lot of time and energy. Basically I think they acknowledge my job is hard work too.

What do you think is currently restricting the development and use of electronics in general by women?
Personally, since I began in this industry, my career has been very smooth in this respect, so I have not felt any restriction due to my gender. From my perspective there is no creator gender problem. Its all about users. You make games because you like them and because you want to share your creations with users. They would enjoy them, would be surprised, excited or feel comfortable. So if you are able to feel that there is no problem in your game-making process and you would feel no limits. In the past there were only a few female creators so it may have looked like we needed to fix that. In reality, nowadays, there are many female programmers in Japan so one doesn't feel the old impression of imbalance between the sexes.

Melissa Ricci



Melissa Ricci became so fed up with a lack of female-centric videogame development, support and networking that she set up www.gamegoddesses.com as part of her graduate course. A small but growing and thriving community has sprung up, commenting on all things sexist in the industry.

Name: Melissa Adrianna Ricci.
Age: 23.
Home: Watertown, NY USA.
Nationality: American.
Occupation: Graduate student, graphics.

Skills: B.S. Computer Science (C++), Java, VB, Unix shell programming, M.S. Information Design & Technology (Macromedia & Adobe software, Freehand drawing, animation), washing up.

Hobbies: Videogaming, Web design, ping-pong, anime, collecting videogame memorabilia.

First Videogame: *Barbie* produced by Epyx for the Commodore 64.

Consoles: NES, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, PSone, N64, Dreamcast, PS2, GBA, GameCube.

Preferred genres: RPG, action/adventure, strategy, lightgun.

Favourite videogame: *FFX*. I adore moogles. The newly introduced battle system and sphere grid were ingenious. Graphically and in terms of scripting, things were top-notch.

Least favourite videogame: *Quake III* gives me a headache every time I play – seriously.

How many hours do you play games per week?
25-plus.

What was the last title you bought?
Resident Evil 0 (GC) and *Mario Party 4* (GC). I put two here because they were purchased at the same time and I can't quite remember which was rung up first.

Have you ever been annoyed by representations of women in videogames? If so what and why?
Absolutely. Especially by the language used to describe female characters in reviews and previews. A preview of *Bloodrayne* in 'Play' magazine (October 2002, p36) comes to mind immediately. The first paragraph reads: "After a year of staring at her private parts and even giving the real thing a squeeze at E3, Majesco's new half-breed (but she's all woman), *Bloodrayne*, has finally decided to drop by the office for a little bit of the old hands-on." I found that to be particularly offensive due to the sexual references. It is obvious the magazine views her as nothing more than a sex object.

Have you ever felt persecuted when playing videogames because of your gender?
As far as male videogamers go, I've heard on more than one occasion, "Well, you're not a *real* gamer because you don't play firstperson shooters." My response? "So what?" Genre preference is irrelevant in my book. The hardcore gamer is someone who survives on videogames: and that I do.

Do any of your female friends ridicule you? Do any join with you in playing?
When I was younger, I would come home from school and immediately play Nintendo until it was time for dinner. During my early years in school, I had two female friends who would play videogames with me staying up all night on the weekends and taking turns playing, giving each other verbal encouragement to complete the level or defeat the boss. We would videotape the endings of the games and save them on labelled VHS tapes. Unfortunately (for them), they grew out of videogaming while I didn't. I am currently doing a postgraduate course at an institute of technology and, although over the years I have seen an increase, there are still few females on campus. When I received my AS in Computer Science I was the only female to graduate with that degree. As you can imagine, I didn't meet very many females, let alone female gamers. I am now the only female member of the Games Club on campus. Girls who do not take any interest in videogaming often view me as strange.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for the female by other females?
I think in time it will become more socially acceptable. Right now, I think many females see videogames as overwhelmingly violent and sexist and some are not willing to overlook those things (and I don't blame them) to enjoy the gameplay of many popular titles. Once the game market evens out in terms of those things (ie when the market becomes less saturated with offensive imagery and language), a greater number of females will accept videogaming as a main form of entertainment.

What inspired you to set up Game Goddesses?
The Website started out as a project for an advanced information design class. The assignment was to create ten pages of information for a niche audience. It was posted via telnet on the college server about a month before it was due in class. I then bought the gamegoddesses.com domain and so it was born with my backup files. Then, I decided to add a member directory so that girl gamers could keep in touch. My first recruitment started with emails to likely suspects/candidates and the first Game Goddesses began to appear.

As the site started to grow, I submitted the URL to DMOZ. And so you see the site as it is now. It has been difficult to run the site on my own without any sponsorship, as I have been paying all the costs of operation. Positive feedback from fellow gamers and the knowledge that I am providing a service for a special set of gamers makes it all worthwhile. I now plan to push forward with the site in full-force, completely redesigning the interface and adding more content. I would like to acquire a better hosting plan so that I can add some more dynamic elements to the site.

It has been said that the development and use of electronics in general by women has to become more socially acceptable before videogames do. What needs to change if this is to happen?

"If you place game consoles and computers in boys' rooms instead of in a central room in the house, what message is that sending to girls in the family?"

I think part of it starts at home. When parents discourage girls from using technology or videogames, they are sending a direct message that it's a boy thing. If my dad hadn't encouraged me to use our first computer I may not be where I am today. I think that's a strong message for parents. If you place game consoles and computers in boys' rooms instead of in a central room in the house, what message is that sending to girls in the family?

I think some change needs to take place in the videogame industry as well. The industry is made up of mostly men and targets male consumers as a general rule. The industry sells the idea that videogames are solely for a male audience. Producing games for one specific audience is limiting the amount of revenue and support that could be obtained from a wide female consumer base. According to the IDSA, women make up a large percentage of gamers (almost half). Of course this figure does not take into account the hardcore versus casual gamer ratio and those female gamers who pay little or nothing for games (ie online gamers playing *Solitaire* or *Bejeweled*). But with knowing that, think of what a large untapped female audience there is. No in-depth study I am aware of has been done on this. Why hasn't the industry taken these figures into serious consideration?

However, there are already many positive female role models depicted in videogames (consider the *Resident Evil* women or Alexandra from *Eternal Darkness*) and more emphasis could be placed on them in related media. A proper balance needs to be established. Which reminds me of the game *The Longest Journey* developed by Funcom. Our quest to make things equal between genders, to provide a suitable balance, will prove to be a long journey but it is a journey we must set out on.

Do you ever purchase titles yourself?
I almost always purchase titles myself. Sometimes I have games pre-ordered months ahead, other times I buy games at the spur of the moment. I purchase an absolute minimum of three games a month.



Jennie Kong

The Insider

As PR manager for SCEE **Jennie Kong** is in an ideal position to survey popular videogaming trends and how they relate to the female gamer. Fortunately her passion and knowledge of videogames matches her calling. **Edge** asks her to briefly remove her Sony hat and talk openly about her experiences as a gamer.

Full Name: Jennie Kong.
Age: 23.
Home: London.
Nationality: Hong Kong/British.
Occupation: UK PR manager, Sony Computer Entertainment.

Skills: Making people laugh. Linguistic manoeuvring. Stupidity.

Hobbies: Film making, gig going, world travelling.

First Videogame: *Spike* on Vectrex or a Game & Watch.

Consoles: PC Engine, SNES, Saturn, Dreamcast, N64, GBC, GBA, GameCube, PSone and PS2.

Preferred genres: I like all genres, but shy away from footy franchises and flight sims.

What was the last title you bought? *Animal Crossing*.

Favourite videogame: Hand on heart, in the 17 years I have been playing videogames – I don't have an absolute favourite game of all time. Ones I love though are: *Street Fighter II*, *Dino Crisis* series, *Bubble Bobble*, *Fear Effect*, *Time Crisis* series, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Space Harrier*, *Gauntlet*, *Resident Evil* series, *Mario* series, *Zelda* series, *Head over Heels*, *Pokémon*, *Lagoon*, *Tetris*, *Double Dragon*, *Feud*, *DDR*, *Point Blank* series and *The Getaway*. These games have stuck with me as they caused a rush of delight, surprise as well as frustrated joypad throwing.

Least favourite videogame: *Barbie goes Shopping* on Game Boy.

How many hours do you play games per week?
At present, probably 7–10 hours.

Have you ever been annoyed by representations of women in videogames? If so what and why?
I really take it in my stride. I have great respect for characters like Jennifer Tate, Lara Croft, Yasmin, Joanna Dark, etc because they're sexy but are represented as powerful and lead characters as well. Weak representations of women who have no real purpose in a game annoy me.

Do any of your female friends ridicule you? Do any join with you in playing?
No, they're fine with it. I suppose they find it useful that they know I have confidence around technology and they ask me to set up their video player or something silly like that.

Have you ever converted a fellow female to gaming?
A couple. I gave a *Resident Evil* special edition PSone to my old housemate, Louise, once for her birthday and she absolutely loved it even though she couldn't get past the first level.

Has your partner ever been frustrated with the amount of time you spend playing videogames?
In the past, there was this one partner who got riled when I kept kicking his ass every time on *Point Blank*. It made me laugh when he said I should only stick to my side of the screens, defeating the object of winning. My current boyfriend works in the industry so doesn't mind me playing games at all.

Do you and partner ever play videogames together?
Games take up so much of our professional lives that we do a lot of other things like watching films, hanging out at home and going out. We tend to send each other mpegs of future games that look cool instead. However, we have dabbled in playing a little *Bomberman*, *VF4*, *Super Monkey Ball* and *The Getaway*.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for women by other women?
Both marketing style and media exposure clearly play a big part in the demographic of gamers as I think the female massmarket needs encouragement through seeing other women playing games (*DDR*, GBA and the EyeToy have been great for this). I think women need to provide an input of making games. If more female gamers played a part in the business, development and production like in the film industry then more games could be produced that wouldn't patronise or isolate the female market. A female Hideo Kojima – could you imagine?

Working for Sony do you encounter any sexism from males either at work or those you deal with?
Guys tell me that they have a lot of respect for me because I genuinely care about the games. There's no sexism at work.

It has been said that the development and use of electronics in general by women has to become more socially acceptable before videogames will. What needs to change if this is to happen?
I think females are more technology savvy than people give them credit for. Females are great users of electronics. It's more to do with availability to them while they're young. For instance, parents and schools should play a part in encouraging more use and understanding of electronics in general. It's also a lot to do with social perception of electronics. If the media and supplier made them available to women in their social domains, then women will have better accessibility and understanding to electronics.

Do you ever purchase titles yourself?
Yes, though I haven't done so for a while thanks to nice thirdparty publishers.



Madame Hardcore

A long-term French hardcore gamer, collector and importer of Japanese games, **Alice Villéger** has been responsible for key input in some of the best videogame fansites on the Web. An expert in the adventure and Japanese RPG fields she approaches the videogames gender issue as a consumer.

Full Name: Alice Villéger.
Age: 22.
Home: Clermont Ferrand, France.
Nationality: French.
Occupation: Medical Imaging PhD and lecturer in Computer Science.

Skills: Programming, drawing and computer graphics.

Hobbies: Videogames, cinema and animation (Japanese or otherwise), manga, SF and fantasy literature, skiing.

First videogame: That was a very long time ago… at first I'd only watch my big brother playing although I did give the 8bit *Double Dragon* game on Sega Master System a try. What really got me hooked were the 16bit classics *Zelda* and *Super Mario World* on SNES: not the first games I played, but the first I finished.

Consoles: GB, GBC, GBA, an old Yeno system, Sega Master System, Mega Drive, NES, SNES, PSone, N64, GameCube and a PS2.

Preferred genres: The enlarged family of RPG including sub-genres tactical-RPGs and action-RPGs, as well as close relatives such as action/exploration games like *Zelda* or the recent *Castlevania* games. I'm also quite fond of strategy/simulation games like *Civilization*, and good old funny PC adventure games by LucasArts and such. I really enjoy fun multiplayer games too, for example *Mario Kart*, *Bomberman* or *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*.

Favourite videogame: Tough choice. I love most of Square's games, especially the SNES ones, due to the nostalgia factor. I'd say *Chrono Trigger* (though *Final Fantasy VI* comes very close). To me, it's just flawless: gorgeous backgrounds, accomplished battle animations, memorable character design, excellent soundtrack, very immersive, tight gameplay, good balance between battles and exploration, interesting combo system and good replay value due to the 'new game +' feature.

Least favourite videogame: *Quest 64* on the N64. Even worse than *Final Fantasy Mystic Quest* on SNES. A total waste of money.

How many hours do you play games per week?
It varies a lot, depending on whether I'm hooked on a game or not and whether it's holiday time. It can go up to 50 hours a week… a reasonable average would be around 15 hours.

Have you ever been annoyed by representations of women in videogames? If so what and why?
Not really offended. The 'damsel in distress' cliché is becoming less and less frequent except in the *Mario* games where it's a genre convention (even turned into a private joke in *Super Mario RPG*). Actually many games feature positive representations of women, such as strong-willed yet feminine female protagonists who play an active part in saving the day.

The only thing that annoys me is the Lara Croft trend, and more generally, the 'big-breasted scantily-clad girls in sexy posture' cliché. I don't like the 'sex sells' commercial attitude, and besides, this marketing tactic seems to imply that the videogame consumers market is only composed of horny young men. As a female gamer, it annoys me to feel left out by publishers.

If anything most recent attempts to design games specifically to appeal to the 'new market' of female gamers have been more offensive to me: fashion games, shopping games. Talk about stereotypes.

Have you ever felt persecuted when playing videogames because of your gender?
Specifically, the manner in which some videogames related media simply ignore the existence of female gamers and take for granted that their audience is exclusively composed of male teenagers and 20-or-so-year-old guys. But then ignorance isn't necessarily persecution.

Do any of your female friends ridicule you?
Some of them have a dubious attitude at first, but after giving it a try, most acknowledge that a multiplayer gaming session is actually a highly enjoyable way to pass time. The only thing they could ridicule (and I'd join them on that one) would be a totally obsessive attitude towards games. Since there are other hobbies we can share and talk about, my gaming habits have never been a problem.

Have you ever converted a fellow female to gaming?
Most of my friends already played videogames before I met them, actually. My influence only got them to play a little more (with me), or to discover new genres, rare imported games, etc. The others started playing with me, or occasionally on their own, when I'd lend them games, but few would care to invest their own money in this new and somewhat expensive hobby.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for women by other women?
Concerning the supposed unpopularity of games among women in general, maybe the problem lies more in the stereotyped perception of games than in their content itself. I'd say this biased perception is mostly due to the image propagated by the media, especially the commercials. One *Zelda: Ocarina of Time* US advertisement I saw, showed Link slashing monsters with a big sword. After a while the speaker posed the question, "Get the girl? Or play like one?" No comment.

More generally, I think commercials (on TV or in newspaper) put too much emphasis on the challenge (hundreds of monsters, tons of levels) and the fact you need balls to do it (yeah, big swords! Big guns! Big muscles and girls with big tits!), and don't spend enough time showing how fun, or what a great experience, the game might be. Too often have I seen at the end of a game's review: "will appeal to children and females." As if girls could only enjoy childish games. You just wouldn't get away with it in other forms of entertainment.

Add the 'gamer equals loner' stereotype to the equation and you can imagine how a female onlooker's perception has been coloured. In the future, for games to turn fully mainstream they need to take into account the interests of the female audience. This might sound a bit clichéd, but 'saving the world' is probably a more motivating goal for the average female gamer than 'beating the crap out of monsters with your big gun' (although there *is* some fun included in that particular activity). The social factor is also something to take into account. Actually I've read one social study on MMRPGs, showing that there was quite a high proportion of female gamers on the server, and that contrary to male gamers, those were usually actively involved in the 'social interaction' activities (guild stuff, playing in a team) proposed by the game.

In my opinion it's the image of games more than the content that needs to shift. Actually, developers seem to be making more efforts to please the female audience, nowadays. It's a crying shame the marketing staff don't follow suit.

"One Ocarina of Time advert I saw, showed Link slashing monsters with a big sword. After a while the speaker posed the question, 'Get the girl? Or play like one?' No comment"

What do you think is currently restricting the purchase of videogames by women?
In all developed countries, women use mobile phones, TVs, CDs and DVD players. They use computers to chat with their friends and read their mail so I don't believe it's an issue of technofear. I believe women want to buy something that they have no use of but they can brag about in front of their friends they'll buy some new handbag or piece of clothing, while men will rather buy a new piece of high tech stuff. It's an inbred societal thing.

When you go into a shop, does US game artwork, notoriously sexist in its representation of women, ever turn you off?
US game artwork in general (be it male or female representations) usually turns me off. I remember almost failing to notice the SNES *Breath of Fire* box in a shop, because of the totally-out-of-character ugly artwork (some kind of over-muscular blue-haired barbarian brandishing a sword and, of course, scantily-clad-big-breasted-females) that pressed me to look away.

Aleksandra Krotoski

The Presenter

A journalist and writer, **Aleksandra Krotoski** has been playing videogames since *Paper Boy* landed in her local arcade just outside Disney Land. Academia was her calling but almost by chance she fell into presenting, most famously as part of the dynamic game girl trio who presented Channel 4's late night videogames show 'Bits' (she was the one with the accent) and later with 'Thumb Bandits'. Krotoski spends much of her time spring cleaning her online email account of requests that she enlarge her penis.

Full Name: Aleksandra Krystyna Theresa Krotoski.
Age: 28.
Home: Leamington Spa.
Nationality: American/British.
Occupation: Writer and general pundit.

Skills: 60wpm, hunter-gatherer, jam-maker, irritant.

Hobbies: Walking, cycling, learning drums, freaking myself out watching psychological thrillers, thinking too much.

The first game you played: *Pac-Man*. Arcade. I was too short to see the screen.

Consoles: Atari 2600, Intellivision, N64 PAL, N64 NTSC, GameCube NTSC, Dreamcast PAL, Dreamcast NTSC, PSone, PlayStation2 PAL, Game Boy (signed by Shigeru Miyamoto), Game Boy Advance, Game & Watch(es), Neo-Geo, Xbox. Please don't rob me.

Preferred genres: Adventure, platform-adventure, FPS (especially in cooperative mode), arcade.

Favourite game of all time and why: *Halo*. It pushed the boundaries of an FPS into the realm of an action-adventure with amazing team-based elements. Seamless story, seamless graphics, seamless action, seamless problem-solving. It has surpassed the comedy of the *GTA*s, the innocent innovation of *Super Mario Brothers*, the ridiculousness of *Vib Ribbon* and *PaRappa the Rapper*, the plotlines of *Silent Hill*. It's perfect.

Least favourite game of all time and why: Anything that makes you feel like you're wasting your time. There are too many to mention.

How many hours do you play games per week?
Between eight and 15.

Have you ever been annoyed by representations of women in videogames? If so what and why?
No. I'm irritated by the fact that people in the Outside World think that the inclusion of a character like Lara Croft is a 'step forward' for women in videogames and that every time there's a new *Tomb Raider* game on release the press go mental over the Women in Games issue. She's a female lead. So what? She's not created for women to play because she's a lady. She's created for men to play. It's the game that women play. In other news, I think Lola (of *The Sexy Empire*) is hilarious.

Have you ever felt persecuted when playing videogames because of your gender?
I don't feel persecuted when I'm playing because I can hold my own against anyone regardless of gender, but I do feel like it when people are amazed that I do play.

Did you three girls encounter much cynicism for your gender while working on 'Bits'?
All the time. It was either, "You can't really play games! You've got breasts!" or "You've got breasts! Marry me!" Emily Dunn kept getting asked if she was a lesbian. For some reason, men – and only men – can't accept that heterosexual women can and do play games.

Do any of your female friends ridicule you? Do any join with you in playing?
Most of my female friends play games. Those that don't tend to roll their eyes and leave the room once the console is turned on.

Have you ever converted a fellow female to gamer?
Nope, but I'm always surprised at the resistance I get from women when I try to convince them that gaming is brilliant. Why do they do that? They're weird.

Has your partner ever been frustrated with the amount of time you spend playing videogames?
Ha! He'd rather I play more! I get really frustrated when he plays without me because he'll continue on a game that we've been playing together and he'll take it over. By the time I get back to it I have no idea what's going on and I don't have the skills to continue. So I quit. And then I get annoyed because he's using the TV to play the game that he took over and I can't play it because I have no chance of ever catching up. So I have to just sit there and watch. That's no fun. It sucks. So I annoy him. And then we have a fight. But we love each other. I swear.

With more and more girls playing games what do you think needs to change if videogames are to become socially acceptable for women by other women?
To be honest, there's not much we can do right now. We have to wait out a bad rep developed by geeks in personal growth. The industry is considered a boy's trade, games are considered boys' toys. But games are already changing; there's more community, there's more social interaction, there's more characterisation, there's more involvement on a personal level. These are, according to the pundits, what girls like in games. And funnily enough, boys like it too – even in FPSs. As the next generation of kids grows up saturated with interactive products the social stereotype will dissolve and then we will find more females playing games.

It has been said the development and use of electronics in general by women has to become more socially acceptable before videogames will. What needs to change if this is to happen?
How many women use mobiles? Computers? Walkmen? Pilots? Digital watches? Stereos? Tama-bloody-gotchis? They're already using electronics! Girls are weird. I've never understood why they talk themselves out of something that's so much fun because they think it doesn't go with their nail polish. Sheesh. Women are becoming a presence in games companies. They're programming, they're designing, they're developing, they're animating. Hell, women helped start the computer revolution! More women in the industry need to talk to kids about what they do in order to reduce the damaging stereotype that Women Don't Do Computers.

What do you think is currently restricting the development and use of electronics in general by women?
God knows. I suppose it's advertising. Gadgets aren't advertised as something that's Cool For Everyone. They're something that's Cool For Men. I'm *not* advocating female-directed advertising because that's simply condescending and will turn absolutely everyone off from things like games. But a good example of a successful non-gendered marketing campaign is Sony. Although I'm not a big fan of its products I do like the way it's developed its image. The adverts it's been broadcasting are interesting and surreal, something that piques the interest of everyone, not just men.

Do you often purchase titles yourself?
Depends on what I get in the post...

What was the last title you bought?
Vice City.

Would you like your penis enlarged?
Only if it's by 100 per cent and with one jagged little pill.



Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Fantavision

Second hand copies are still fetching high prices, and with good reason: it remains captivatingly brilliant. But it really deserved to have been given away free at launch.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon

"The Yanks are too eager to rush into war," noted one of **Edge**'s allies after sniping an American rival. Oh, the fun voice communication brings to online gaming.



(Xbox) Ubi Soft

Luigi's Mansion

A Saturday night in fighting off the inevitable onset of a nasty cold did at least allow **Edge** to relive Nintendo's short but oh so sweet adventure yet one more time.



(GameCube) Nintendo

Neverwinter Nights

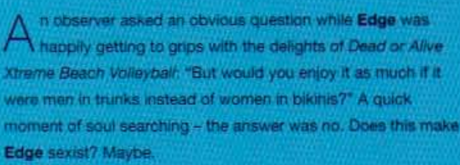
Xbox Live is one reason to upgrade to broadband; *Neverwinter Nights* is another. BioWare's own Witch's Wake currently heads a long list of additional content.



(PC) Infogrames

One lump or two?

Why you're unlikely to see hunks in trunks in videogames



An observer asked an obvious question while **Edge** was happily getting to grips with the delights of *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*: "But would you enjoy it as much if it were men in trunks instead of women in bikinis?" A quick moment of soul searching – the answer was no. Does this make **Edge** sexist? Maybe.

But consider this: only one per cent of **Edge** readers are female. Fact is, videogames are not made to appeal to girls, and those that are, are instantly forgettable. Generally, all games aimed at anyone with two X chromosomes are obvious and cynical marketing tools. How many marketing men in pin-striped suits and Hush Puppies did it take to come up with *The Adventures of Mary-Kate & Ashley*, *Barbie Beach Vacation* and *Spice World*? No, it's not a gag and there's no punchline. It happened and it still continues to happen.

Edge sexist? What is sexist is publishers that think girls deserve less. What do girls know about games? Let's give them substandard pap with a licence slapped on the box, seems to be the thinking. If **Edge**'s features this month show anything it's that women enjoy well crafted experiences. And if anything, demand even more. The social element of gaming is of primary importance. Thankfully some strides have been made in recent months to break the cycle. To this end Konami must be commended for delivering games that appeal to both sexes equally. Not even they could have anticipated the extraordinary success of *Dancing Stage Euromix* on PSone.

But back to the original question: is **Edge** sexist for preferring to see pretty girls indulging in beach games, rather than hunks in trunks? We don't think so. Tomonobu Itagaki's treatment of the female form is overtly sexualised and, some might say, clichéd, but it's certainly not derogatory. Ideally the game should contain beautiful representations of both genders, then gay, straight, male, or female, whatever your orientation or gender, there's titilation on offer for everyone. Which, let's be frank, is part of the game's unique charm.

The industry needs to encourage other demographics to get involved in gaming, and carefully considering the female question is an obvious way forward. Too much expense? That's always the short-sighted excuse, but as females represent over 50 per cent of the world's population it would be prudent for publishers to think about their potential female audience a bit more at the drawing board stage. And, incidentally, this doesn't mean putting badly drawn hookers on pushbikes.



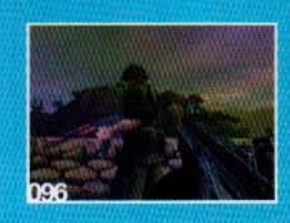




090

092





Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyb

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Tecmo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), March 28 (UK)**





Don't be fooled by the title; *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* isn't a volleyball game. Sure, setting and spiking is undeniably the focus of the game, and it's what you'll spend most of your time doing, but volleyball is not the *point* of the game. The point of the game, if indeed there is one, is to simply chill out, relax, make friends and enjoy the idyllic surroundings of Zack Island. In actual fact, the volleyball mechanics are superb, but there are so many other ways to pass the time, and the game is so refreshingly free of structural constraints, that this is just one facet of a game that matches an almost unparalleled degree of technical excellence with a sublimely engaging play experience.

But – and let's get this out of the way early – is it intended to titillate, and does it objectify women in a potentially damaging way? Is it, in short, morally objectionable? Well the developer's intent is fairly clearly sign-posted. As with previous *Dead or Alive* titles, *DoAX* includes the option to change your 'age', increasing the effect that gravity has on the breasts of the game's pert protagonists. Or there's the fact that there's a substantial amount of female flesh on display, frequently in swimsuits that are little more than fetish outfits. Most obvious though, are the sections of the game that allow players to simply gaze upon the game's bikini-clad playmates frolicking and gambolling around in the sand. For a game that utilises a fixed camera during the actua volleyball, it's especially revealing that these sections feature an array of different angles and zoom functions.

In spite of the game's unique capacity f voyeurism though, it could equally be argue that the platonic relationship-building eleme at the heart of the game is capable of reinforcing empowering notions of sisterhood; it's also a motif that's a welcom alternative to the grandiose destruction and petty larceny that characterises the content of most other videogames. Certainly after th initial novelty wears off there's simply too much going on to really spend too much tir looking at the pretty ladies – though dedicated frustrated male adolescents will n doubt spend an awful lot of time trying to unlock the skimpy Venus costume.

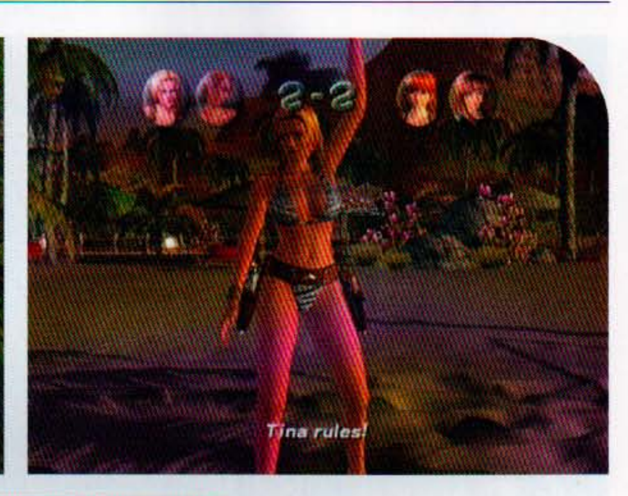




One of the attractions of *DoAX* is that it contains a host of *Dead or Alive*-related bonus materials, including US TV ads, a trailer for *Ninja Gaiden* and (above) the opening movie to *Dead or Alive 3*













One sign of the developer's intent is that some of the game's enormous collection of swimsuits are pretty revealing (right). But the confrontation-free gameplay is wholly admirable and entertaining

In any case, if the girls from *Dead or Alive* were replaced with, say, characters from *Animal Crossing*, the game would be no less entertaining, because it doesn't rely on titillation to sustain cheap thrills; it relies on a captivatingly deep and absorbing structure. Indeed if anything, it bears more comparison to a title such as *Animal Crossing*, rather than a title like *Beach Spikers*. It's unconstrained by any structurally imposed goals other than those of simply relaxing and collecting stuff, and maybe winning the odd game of volleyball.

From the opening strains of Meja's 'How Crazy Are You?' (available to be unlocked later in the game), and the witty pastiche of 'Titanic' with which the game commences, it's clear from the outset that this is a game that doesn't take itself too seriously, focusing instead on making the player's experience an enjoyable one. The wafer-thin premise, that Zack has lured the girls of the Dead or Alive tournament to Zack Island under the pretence of a new fighting competition, sets the stage for a two-week vacation during which you choose a girl and enjoy the island. Each day is broken up into three time periods, over the course of which you can play volleyball, visit the casino, stay poolside, do some sightseeing or buy presents for the other girls from the three stores on the island. There is a possibility that the visit will be cut short if you fail to make friends, but this is the only penalty that the game imposes upon players.

Otherwise, it's up to you to decide how to spend the vacation. Visiting the casino in the evenings provides an

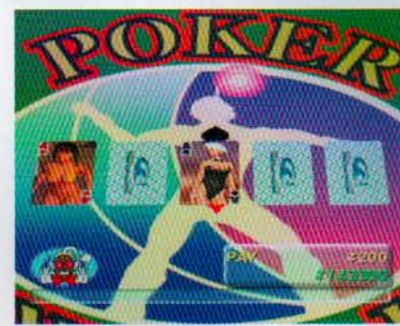
Ripping tunes

It is, of course, possible to rip your own choice of tunes to the Xbox hard drive, and if you're not a fan of holiday soundtracks, you'll probably want to. But you won't need to, because Tecmo has thoughtfully included a soundtrack that provides everything you'd want to accompany a holiday in the sun: Bob Marley, Aswad, Christina Aguilera, B*Witched and The Spice Girls are just a few of the big names who have contributed tunes. And if that sounds a little too eclectic, rest assured that the soundtrack is just as supremely relaxing as the game itself.

"It's clear from the outset that this is a game that doesn't take itself too seriously, focusing instead on making the experience an enjoyable one"



Like any good casino, Zack Island's gambling den offers the lure of easy riches that far too frequently materialises as abject poverty. On an unrelated note, the game offers an anamorphic option for your widescreen viewing pleasure











In an interesting example of videogame intertextuality, Tecmo will be producing a real-world pack of cards based on those used in Zack Island's casino, which faithfully recreates the thrill of real-world gambling

Chill out man

Although Tomonobu Itagaki has shied away from his initial desire to make the game solely singleplayer, there will inevitably be complaints that a fourplayer mode isn't available. But the volleyball on offer in the twoplayer Exhibition mode is just as compelling as it is in the singleplayer game. In any case the point of the game, as Itagaki-san has gone on record as saying, is not competition, but relaxation and in this respect it's an outstanding success.

opportunity to play blackjack, poker, roulette or the fruit machines, each of which is as compulsively addictive (and potentially just as ruinous) as its real-life counterpart. During the day you can simply sunbathe (both sunblock and suntan lotions are available to either accelerate or decelerate the tanning process) or play the Hopping Game by the pool, which sees your chosen girl attempt to cross the pool by jumping across a series of floats.

Quite apart from being a curiously relaxing pastime in its own right, this also provides a gentle introduction to the niceties of the control system used during the volleyball itself; a gentle button tap produces significantly different results to those generated by weightier button pressing.

Perhaps the most important way of passing the time is by buying gifts; in a way, the volleyball itself can be seen as a litmus test of your success in establishing successful relationships with the other girls on the island. Each girl has her own likes and dislikes, as well as favoured companions, but it's essential to win the affection of at least one girl if you want a partner to play volleyball with, and it's desirable to foster a rapport with her if you want her to perform well on court. Making new friends also makes it easier to unlock the full range of swimsuits and accessories, since the other girls will give gifts in return for your generosity.

This relationship-building aspect undeniably enhances the volleyball itself. The frustration of finding yourself with no mates to play with (which is all too easy if you play as Christie) is excruciating, and it really stings when your partner throws a tantrum at an error that you *know* is your fault. But even without this added dimension, the volleyball is outstanding in its own right.

With only two buttons (set and spike), it all comes down to positioning, timing and cooperation with your partner (who can be given rudimentary instructions via the right analogue stick). Although both positioning and timing quickly become second nature, rendering victory relatively easy, every single point is a significant contest, and the action never loses its hypnotic appeal. Technically it's excellent too, both visually and in terms

"After the initial novelty wears off there's simply too much going on to really spend too much time looking at the pretty ladies"









The volleyball itself is just another part of a sublime package, reliant on delicate timing and positioning

of AI, and though the camera is fixed, it rarely causes any trouble.

What this all adds up to is the fact that two weeks on Zack Island simply isn't enough. Fortunately though, the game is essentially open-ended; load up a completed save game and all the girls will have all the swimsuits and accessories that have been unlocked in previous games.

But this is about much more than just collecting swimsuits, and it's about much more than just volleyball. By departing from established videogame norms and offering an experience that is unfettered by restrictive goals and objectives, Tecmo has succeeded in evoking a supremely relaxing vacation atmosphere and producing a quite unique, and singularly satisfying game.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



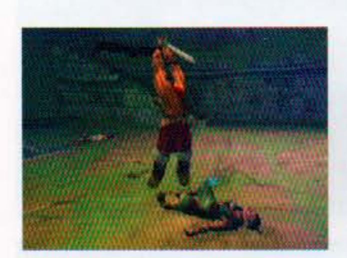




Building friendships by giving gifts forms the basis of most of your activities on Zack Island, but even the antisocial gamer is catered for with the simple but entertaining Hopping Game by the pool

The Mark of Kri

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **SCEA (San Diego Studio)** Price: **£40** Release: **March 21**





Here's a warning for those easily offended by violence in videogames. *The Mark of Kri* is brutal. Really brutal. It has many distinguishing features, but its comic book savageness strikes you from the very first encounter. And it's more pronounced because of the stylisation. Enemies shriek in pain when struck, bodies are dismembered with sickening crunches and the blood spills freely. But significantly, it never feels gratuitous, the sense of achievement after foes are eliminated is more marked because of the visceral content, not despite it.

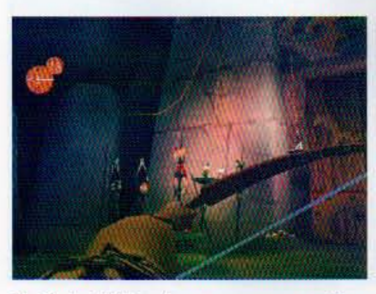
True, a fantasy game from Sony is hardly reason to get excited. Not that the company can't produce slick, fun and well-presented games. It's just that they often lack the X factor. Which, ironically, is where *The Mark of Kri* comes in. Combining ladders and platform sections with combat, Sony's San Diego Studio has delivered a clever hack 'n' slash system which deserves great praise.

"Enemies shriek in pain when struck, bodies are dismembered with sickening crunches and the blood spills freely. But it never feels gratuitous"



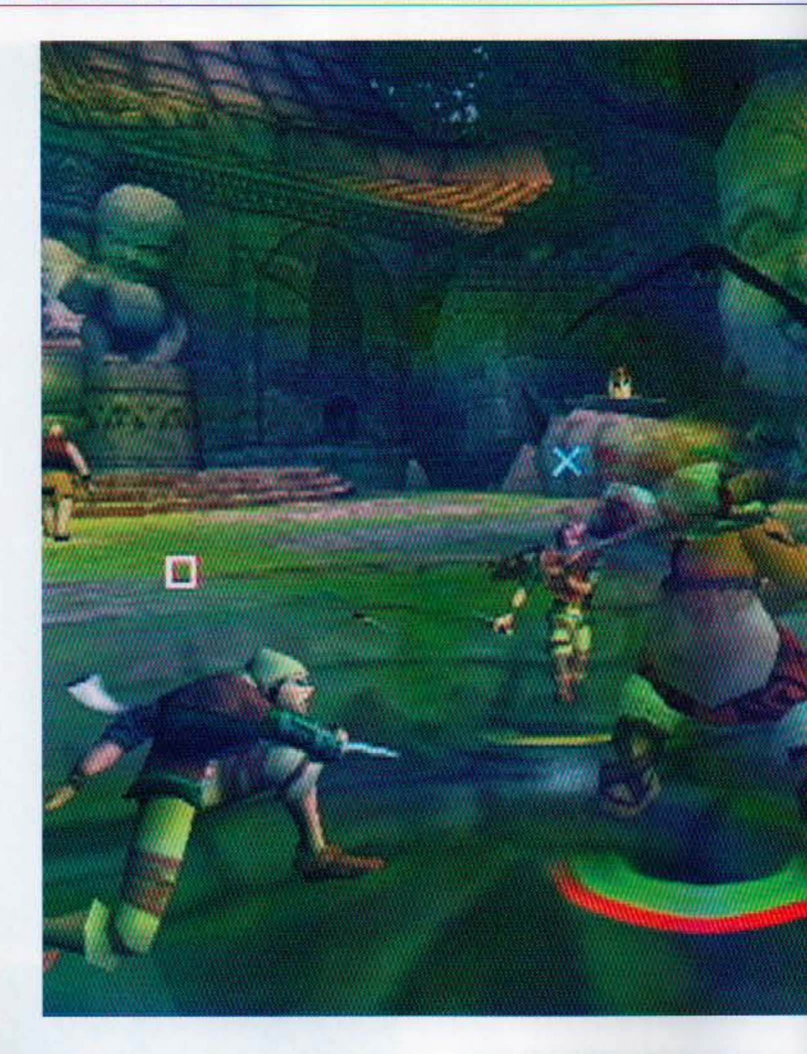
It's entirely feasible that you could get through the whole adventure using simple jabs and thrusts, but performing the special moves is far, far more satisfying

Enemies are targeted by rotating the right analogue stick. The first enemy is then marked with the X symbol, the second a square and the third a circle, and so on. Pressing the corresponding button launches an attack, and special combos can be unleashed with skilled timing. Meet three bandits in a shady grove and you can elect to take one out with an elaborate special move, or target all three and pummel each one little by little. However, the more enemies you target, the more limited your combo options become. It's a fluid system that produces some wonderful moments and flourishes.





***The Mark of Kri* introduces new weapons at the point where you'd otherwise become jaded. The bow, in particular, spices up the gameplay immeasurably and adds a cerebral dimension to stealthy progress**



It's a simple hero adventure, with the main character, Rau, trying to understand his roots, but it's enhanced by impeccable voice acting and artwork. Rau's abilities are further upgraded as he earns extra weapons at the end of key levels. The bow, for instance, opens up a new gameplay dimension and gives the stealth a further edge.

Your trusty familiar, Kuzo, further enhances these stealth opportunities. This spirit guide can be sent to perches throughout the gameworld. Your close bond with the animal enables you to see through its eyes, so you are aware of potential threats. The device works superbly and adds a strategic element to what might have been another generic hack 'n' slash title.

For a game built on such a novel combat system the stealth works surprisingly well. In many levels it's possible to reach the end goal without having to resort to any open combat. Encounters are linked like a series o intelligent puzzles. Firing arrows into bells or animals can distract guards and as their patrol patterns alter, the stealth kill opens up. And if anything, the stealth animations are even more vicious than those in close combat. Although pre-canned footage is used, taking out several enemies by dispatching them with a snap of the spinal column or a sword through the heart is incredibly satisfying.

Don't expect cutting-edge AI or the freedom to explore vast expanses. *The Mark of Kri* is a limited, but well-honed, experience There's craft evident everywhere, from the stylised environments and the vibrant characterisation to the well-rounded storyline

Previously in E120



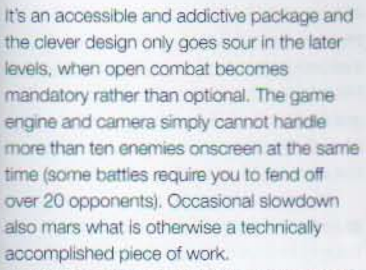








Disarming enemies is the game's trump card. Pressing the R1 button just as an enemy strikes triggers a finishing move that can be devastating



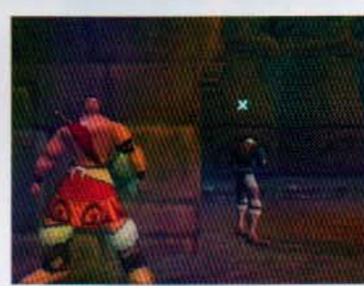
It's an accessible and addictive package and the clever design only goes sour in the later levels, when open combat becomes mandatory rather than optional. The game engine and camera simply cannot handle more than ten enemies onscreen at the same time (some battles require you to fend off over 20 opponents). Occasional slowdown also mars what is otherwise a technically accomplished piece of work.

Despite these glitches, *The Mark of Kri* is a beautiful, enchanting and unusual game. Just don't blame us if you blanch at the sight of digital blood.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



The combat system is clever and intuitive, so that if your sneaking fails you can always fight your way out of trouble. Only when too many enemies turn up in the latter half of the game does it become cumbersome



Encounters later in the game should be treated like a series of puzzles. Taking out all the foes without being detected is a grand challenge



Savage garden

In the opening level Rau is armed with a basic sword, so learning how to sneak-attack is crucial. The forest groves are perfect for light footfalls and executing an instant kill is merely a matter of moving slowly up behind the enemy then pressing X. The ensuing violence will have 'Daily Mail' readers spitting into their cornflakes.

Primal

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **In-house (Cambridge Studio)** Price: **£40** Release: **April 11**

Be afraid. Be very afraid. A dark secret lurks at *Primal*'s heart – yet first appearances suggest a concept of almost clinical clarity. The building blocks of the gameplay are the basic principles of the midtempo, puzzles-and-ghouls adventuring format of *Blood Omen* and *Soul Reaver*. The novel addition is the inclusion of a second playable character with distinct abilities.

"The fighting is an abomination. Ever wondered why nobody maps main attack controls on to the DualShock2 shoulder buttons? Play Primal"









Graphically accomplished, at least in parts, *Primal* is ultimately let down badly by a frustrating combat system and some erratic gameplay features

The marketing insight is that the sober, occasionally aimless mood of those games, combined with their absurd myth-mongering, makes them exactly the kind of purchase that the average *GTAIII*-head regards as irredeemably unappealing. The design solution is an audiovisual overhaul full of noisy guitars and ballsy, superpowered girls, as though in tribute to the demographic homing missile that is 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'.

Even once the game is in motion, that design seems to have been realised with style. Despite her generic post-Lara looks, heroine Jen's personality is established thanks to a library of deft and distinctive animations and an above-average script. Although her quips aren't up to Slayer standards, they're more than passable, and as the slick opening FMV gives way, in well-conceived segments, to the game engine, positive impressions persist.

Sooner or later, though – after wandering through some more of *Primal*'s darkly pretty locales, collecting a handful of objects, opening a couple of doors, thrashing away at the threat of some demonic foes in the style of an electrocuted cheerleader and digesting some more skilfully staggered plot revelations – the secret betrays itself. It can't help it. This is it. This is the game. A 3D adventure so prescriptive and hand-holding that it could almost be called on-rails.

Like *Star Fox Adventures*, *Primal* is built on simple exploration, signposted puzzles, the acquisition and deployment of powers and a lock-on combat system. Both games aim for a diverting, Hollywood-smooth and universally accessible experience by sacrificing subtlety and scope for independent thought, movement or progress through the game. *Star Fox Adventures*, though, at least largely succeeds.



The select button selects control of either Scree or Jen, and progress often necessitates swapping between them. All too frequently, though, the feature feels like lazy lifespan-padding

Primal is at least as restrictive as Rare's featherweight epic and even more obtrusively helpful – unlike *SFA*'s optional hint-yapper Slippy, its leads and its level maps have a habit of blurting out advice even when it's not asked for. A single action button covers everything except the fighting, which is an abomination unto itself. (Ever wondered why nobody maps main attack controls on to the DualShock2 shoulder buttons? Play *Primal*.)

Jen's sidekick Scree has several smart and apposite magical powers, but one of his basic skills is climbing masonry. Even if you can ignore the sub-*Spider-Man* camera angles that plague Scree's descents, there's little joy in the headless-chicken scouting required to stumble upon the apparently arbitrary wall to which he'll stick.

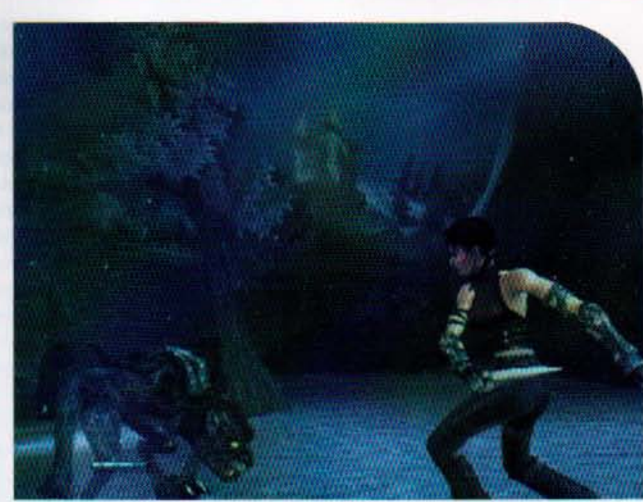
Elsewhere, the player is at one minute gifted with demon feet that facilitate huge leaps, and the next stubbornly prevented from scaling an obstacle little higher than a roadside curb. A game ruled by a wary tempo – a *Biohazard* or a *Zettai Zetsumei Toshi* – can get away with tiny crevices that can't be crossed, broken ledges that are a little too high, and clue-finding at a shuffle, they play on the idea of powerlessness, on exploration as a protracted process of flight. *Primal*, though, has aspirations of instant gratification. And while it does have a few other things to shout about, it never really manages on those fronts.

Primal's mistakes are consequences of its restrictive practices, which makes them all the less forgivable. For all that, somebody up there probably regards it as a trailblazing taste of high-concept, one-size-fits-all blockbuster games to come. Consider that, and know true *Primal* fear.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Previously in E112, E118, E120







With the option of as many quicksaves as your memory card can carry and a Scree-powered resuscitation option for Jen before she slips towards certain doom, it takes a real effort to be put out of your misery. A shame given that the developer has previously worked on the accomplished Medievil series. At least you get the option of a 60Hz video mode, as you'd expect from an in-house SCEE PS2 production



DMC at least got the fighting right, *Soul Reaver 2* had a certain level of sedate, puzzling pleasure, and *Maximo* dazzled with old-skool ethics and tight controls. *Primal* boasts no such distinguishing feature

Pretty vacant

Primal's visual style is its most coherent element. The imaginative territory is not new – spooky ancient realms done out in lots of brown, noble races with great power and big horns, mystical power-ups which generate green lighting effects, and the forces of chaos swelling to universe-threatening proportions again – but it's nicely done, and its backstory of lost heirs and crumbling old regimes is almost melancholy. Given the familiar constraints and iconography of the genre, its graphical accomplishments are, at some points, truly distinguished. (Wherever else it's outclassed, *Primal* boasts some of the most breathtaking torch-in-tunnel shadows seen on a console.)



Racing Evoluzione

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Milestone** Price: **£40** Release: **March**

Imagine building one of the most visually arresting racing games in recent memory, infusing the track design with great ingenuity, then having your work cruelly undermined by a learning curve shallower than a hill in Holland. *RE* is simply not challenging enough to make it stand out from the crowd. Making it accessible to anyone with a pulse effectively erodes all the effort expended elsewhere.

The craving for massmarket coin seems to have overridden any other consideration. This is a game designed for the lowest common denominator. Perhaps it was focus grouping, or the judgement of a profit-hungry producer, but *RE* is for everyman, and as a result thrills no one. Anyone with a modicum of skill could drive through this racing game and hardly break into a sweat. At certain moments *RE* can be hypnotic and not at all unpleasurable. But it lacks excitement.

"The level of CPU adjustment is absurd. Crash horrifically and you can actually see rival drivers slowing down on the overhead map"





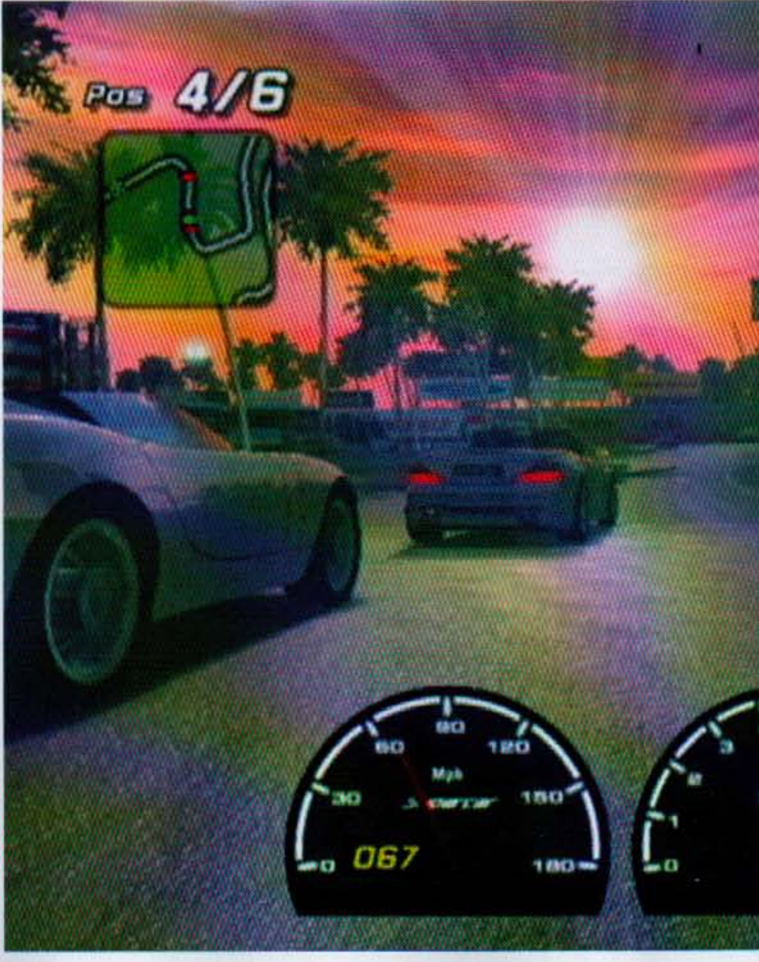


Your grease-monkey (top) offers little more than platitudes and the car management aspects are shallow (centre)

RE's key selling point was meant to be its Dream mode: a structure that allows you to build an automobile brand and empire. This element fails to engage for an obvious reason: all the designs are limited and off-the-peg. Choices are mostly restricted to three, and all you actually do is pick a car dependent on three attributes: top speed, acceleration or brakes. Out on the track the differences are negligible. You're still able to win nearly every race with whatever vehicle you choose to design.

As your empire grows, so does your staff roster. An accountant, a designer, a secretary all become part of your team. The better you do in races the more vehicles you sell. It's satisfying to see your business expand and this adds some impetus to the racing. But to call this 'management' would be to dignify such an automated and simplistic system.

Championships are unlocked one by one at a ponderous pace. It's not even that *RE* is a short game, far from it. There are 39 championships, many consisting of several race events and one-off challenges. You don't even have to come first – in most races third will suffice. There's no incentive to race any tracks for a second time. And that's a major problem: after 20 hours of bland racing with still no end in sight you'll wonder why you bothered. Digital Sunday drivers may get a kick out of winning without having to apply too much skill, most will find something better to play before the halfway point.



The tracks are beautifully designed and *RE* can be a pleasure to play at times. Unfortunately the vehicle A is tuned to your own competence to a stultifying degree. And there's no cockpit view which is unfortunate

This is exacerbated by the fact that the rival CPU cars speed up or slow down depending on your own performance. While many racing games employ these methods, the level of CPU adjustment going on in a typical *RE* race is absurd. Crash horrifically on the first corner of a lap, and you can actually see the red dots of the rival drivers slowing down on the overhead map. Floor the accelerator and you will have caught them up within 30 seconds. This removes the essential drama of any good race game. Typically each challenge is three laps long, but only the last lap counts because the CPU vehicles allow you to catch up too easily. This becomes even clearer later in the game when races are ten or more laps long.

RE is not a terrible game. The handling model, though by no means exalted, has a satisfying feel. Drifting around some of the excellently crafted circuits can be an absolute joy. If anything *RE* is superior in Time Attack mode when you can concentrate on putting in your best lap without being distracted by the retarded behaviour of the other vehicles. No doubt, the game is beautiful and, aside from the implementation of AI, technically excellent. But even players choosing to switch the difficulty setting to 'hard' are likely to find the vacillating behaviour of the competition too unbelievable to bear.

Edge rating: Five out of te

Previously in E112, E115

















Battle your way to the front of the grid and it's entirely possible to hold onto your lead by shutting the door at every corner. No bad thing, but the dumb AI fails to do the same when you are behind

Collisions are handled badly with vehicles bouncing off each other unconvincingly. The noises these prangs evoke are also laughable and sound like someone's sampled an infant banging on a tin drum. It's difficult to get 'in the zone' with *RE* because all these minor flaws undermine your confidence in a cohesive and believable gameworld

The car's the star

Put on the blue jeans and blazer, frizz up the curly hair, *RE* has plenty of top class vehicles to please any Clarkson-headed car nut. As you gradually win races in Dream mode you'll unlock vehicles for the Arcade races. Along with original concept cars created by design students from around Europe you'll find licensed vehicles such as the Lotus Esprit V8, the Aston Martin DB7, the Dodge Viper and the Toyota GT1. Although damage makes it into the game, it only works on a disappointingly superficial level.



IGI2: Covert Strike

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Codemasters** Developer: **Innerloop Studios** Price: **£35** Release: **February 21**





Innerloop Studios might have signed up to a new publisher, but the ground covered by *IGI2* will be pretty familiar to anyone who's played the first instalment in the developer's stealth/action series. Shadowy special ops are once again the order of the day as players are cast as David Jones, the comically (though presumably unintentionally) camp and posh SAS type, thrust into a series of encounters against the forces of cliché and stereotype (such as the "undergraduate from Harvard Business School [who] has been described by his professors as 'a genius when dealing with covert behaviour.'").

Pretty much all of the hallmark features of the original *Project IGI* remain intact, with the result that *IGI2* straddles the same uneasy middle ground between (pseudo) realism and playability as its predecessor, and

"The kernel of promise that existed at the heart of Project IGI hasn't really been nurtured and remains, in IGI2, just that; a kernel of promise"



Despite a few nifty gadgets and a new save function, *IGI2* suffers from all the same failings as its predecessor

consequently strays from the realm of the enjoyable to that of the tedious far more often than is desirable. All the essential details remain the same – it's an FPS which features a singleplayer campaign that takes place over 20 missions and across three terrorist hotspots (Russia, China and Libya). And like the original *IGI*, it has pretensions towards stealth-based gameplay and features 'realistic' damage (ie one or two hit kills) and the ability to slide down guy ropes, pick locks, etc, in thirdperson.

The major difference (aside from the introduction of a multiplayer mode – see So long solo) is that a rudimentary save system has been implemented in a bid to correct one of its predecessors biggest weaknesses. But it is only rudimentary; although the original *IGI* didn't allow saving of any sort, *IGI2* allows three saves per mission, although since each save takes a few seconds to implement these have to be used in positions of safety.

Unfortunately this limited save function doesn't remedy the same trial and error gameplay that characterised the original. While forcing players to learn level layouts is hardly a desirable design trait at the best of times, most developers have the good sense to combine this with a quicksave feature in an attempt to mask their inadequacies.

They certainly don't combine a replay-heavy design structure with large expanses of



If these screenshots look a little spartan, that's because it's rarely advisable to get involved in an outrig gunfight. As was the case in the original *Project IGI*, enemy weapons are just as effective as your own

ground that must be crossed without incident; as was the case with *IGI*, each mission in *IGI2* starts off with what frequently feels like five minutes of uneventful walking before the remotest possibility of any action. The limit of three saves does little to alleviate the tediousness of this, merely artificially elongating missions that would be simple to overcome with the aid of a quicksave: despite the promise of more sophisticated AI, enemies continue to act in a rudimentary manner and are only ever a threat due to the unforgiving efficacy of their weapons.

Still, the game does have its moments. Sneaking around can be fun, and is enhanced by the ability to crouch and crawl, and there is plenty of satisfaction to be derived from picking off enemies from a distance. It's just a shame that the kernel o promise that existed at the heart of *Project IGI* hasn't really been nurtured and remains in *IGI2*, just that; a kernel of promise.

Perhaps the continued support for the multiplayer game that Codemasters is promising (see So long solo) will render the singleplayer game irrelevant, but it won't b clear if this is the case until well after releas In the meantime, the game does little to stand out from the glut of stealth-based titles available on any platform.

Edge rating: Five out of

Previously in E106













The game's narrative never deviates from well-worn cliché, but then that's all that's needed to establish the action. Shame though, that this action is equally free of any real ingenuity



A team-based multiplayer mode, à la *Counter-Strike*, may alleviate the deficiencies of the singleplayer campaign, but only time will tell whether Innerloop's title will foster an online community to do justice to the game's bare bones

So long solo

Codemasters is promising significant support for the online multiplayer component of *IGI2*. It will initially ship with five arenas for players to indulge in team-based *Counter-Strike*-like action, and the game will be supported with freely available downloadable maps and editing tools post release. Unfortunately, only one multiplayer map was available during the beta test, so **Edge** hasn't had a chance to sample this aspect of the game properly, but it will need to be extremely enjoyable to alleviate the deficiencies of the singleplayer game.



LowRider: Round the World

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Pacific Century** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£34)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

A low rider, for those not acquainted with big-pimpin' hip hop videos, is a car modified so that its chassis rides close to the ground. Mostly, though, the modifications go much deeper, with bling-bling spoilers, crazy '80s paint-jobs, and pneumatic lifts on the wheels allowing them to be raised and lowered at the whim of the driver. It's that last alteration that forms the essence of *LowRider*. Players must rock their car back and forth, scoring points for every oscillation, in competition with a computer-controlled opponent. And that, pretty much, is it.

So, it's definitely a rhythm-action game, but not in the way most players would expect. While there's music playing in the background, it's purely incidental. Higher bounces come by timing the button presses as the car strikes the floor again, and again, and have nothing to do with the backbeat. Which is a shame, because it means that there's no style in *LowRider*'s low-riding – it's all about robotic timing, brute force and repetition over elegance.

And it's even more of a shame when you consider how much style's gone into the peripheral elements. Winning competitions provides the player with money, and you can spend money on upgrading elements of your car. Better hydraulics on the front and rear will allow higher bounces; a better battery will mean the bouncing can be sustained for longer. But then there are the superficial elements to consider: custom paint jobs, wheel rims, spectacular aerials, ridiculous special moves, and so on. There's even a rudimentary paint program to allow artistic bouncers to design their own decals. In much the same way as *DoAX* (see p86) isn't really a volleyball game, it could be argued that *LowRider* isn't really about low riders – it's about upgrading your vehicle to something ridiculously ostentatious.

But then there's nothing as subtle as the personal relationships in *DoAX*, or any larger 'catch 'em all' goal, the core game is much more insubstantial, and there isn't really anywhere to go once the car looks exactly like your car would look if you spent all your money on imitating Latino car-culture rather than importing quirky, throwaway, Japanese videogames. And quirky and throwaway is exactly what *LowRider* is. It's the sort of game that **Edge** really, really wants to like – original, creative, exuberant – but, sadly, it's just not that much fun.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









There are some funky tunes to pop your pelvis to. Unfortunately they have no bearing on the game mechanics and don't even help with your timing





Show your respect for the Lord by painting a bonnet decal of the crucifixion on a pink background. Then make a pilgrimage up the coast and try and bounce right up to heaven. It's what He would have wanted



Sweet ride

There are three main modes of competition. Hop tells you to bounce your front as high as possible, which means pressing triangle at the right time and praying your pneumatics are better than your opponents. Dance is similar, except the moves differ; the computer will cry for you to bounce side to side, or on your back, and you follow. Finally, Street involves you rocking down the street in front of adoring fans, and impressing them by performing the moves they call out.

Impossible Creatures

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios** Developer: **Relic Entertainment** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Previously in E119







A lot of work has clearly gone into the game's singleplayer campaign, but it rarely deviates from the well-worn and the tried and tested



First wave

Apart from quickstart multiplayer games against AI or human opponents, a singleplayer campaign offers a background story that's replete with 1930s style and a setting that's appropriately evocative of Dr Moreau. It tells the story of Rex Chance, trying to uncover the truth surrounding the mysterious death of his boffin father, and provides a justification for restricting the number of animals that players initially have access to, allowing a gentle introduction to the nuances of the system. It's let down though, by an overly-scripted AI, and the repetitive range of objectives.







The combinatorial tactical complexities of *Impossible Creatures* are theoretically vast, but in practice, they're actually rather minimal; outweighed by a tank rush mentality that ultimately proves disappointing

For a game that looked almost complete back at Gamestock in March 2001 it's been a long wait for *Impossible Creatures* (née *Sigma*). Unsurprisingly then, it's a slick and highly polished title, in terms of presentation at least. Unfortunately, it's not quite so slick and polished when it comes to its play mechanics, and given the recent arrival of titles such as *Warcraft III* and *Medieval: Total War*, any self-respecting RTS simply can't afford any slip-ups.

By far the most interesting thing about the game is its central mechanic; the ability to combine real-world creatures and create hybrid units which form the basis of your army. With some 50 (official) real-world creatures to draw upon, ranging from the lobster and scorpion to the snowy owl and great white shark, the scope for emergent tactical possibilities is enlarged by the fact that each has up to seven body parts. Further strategic scope, if any were needed, is borne from the fact that the use of creatures is regulated by the need to research new technology levels during each mission in order to access more powerful animals.

Consequently, the game's chief appeal lies in coming up with a set of units that reflect individual playing styles – be that cheap units for a quick and numerous force with which to quickly overwhelm, or more powerful but costly units geared for defence, for example. Whatever the preference, the challenge of creating a variety of units that are effective during both early and later stages of the game is a pretty satisfying one.

But apart from its admirable combinatoria[l] system, *Impossible Creatures* is just another RTS. Indeed it's fairly simplistic as the genre goes, with only two resources (coal and lightning) and barely a handful of buildings. In theory this should foster a quick and immediate title, but in practice the build-up of resources is slow. There's also a clumsiness when it comes to functionality, with several of the refinements witnessed in other recent RTS titles simply missing. More significantly, the interface precludes delicate tactical micromanagement, with the result that the outcome of combat frequently devolves to weight of numbers – rather than the particula[r] characteristics of a painstakingly crafted unit.

All of which rather undermines the well-conceived core mechanic, and limits the possibilities offered by a title that is, in every other respect, plainly average.

Edge rating: **Five** out of te[n]

SimCity 4

Format: PC Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: Maxis Price: £35 Release: Out now

Most games are simply footnotes in the history of electronic entertainment. But occasionally they are an inspired conceptual step that opens up something new for gaming. The original *SimCity*, developed by Maxis in 1989, was one such game. It defined PC gaming (perhaps rather to its shame) and hooked millions of gamers on running their virtual city, economy, services and all. The same thing can't be said of its 2003 progeny, *SimCity 4*, which remains a footnote to the earlier games, despite heroic efforts to reiterate the franchise with a spectrum of small-scale innovations.

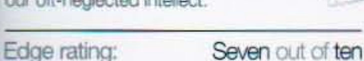
Like all the games in the series, *SimCity 4* initially presents the beginner with a steep learning curve and a bewildering array of options. For the experienced management gamer, however, it will come as a beautiful, refreshing and intricate experience, while managing to remain challenging throughout.

Budding Mayors can expect their initial funds to plummet and for continued running costs to make up a complex system of micro-management that must be dealt with constantly. Once facilities are built they must be budgeted accordingly, such is the level of detail in *SimCity 4* – a fact that many players will no doubt find tedious and uninspiring.

For the persistent player, though, there are huge rewards, with a vast array of possibilities in both 'terraforming' your initial landscape and in the construction of the city itself. There's nothing quite like 'painting' herds of animals onto your landscape, or indeed the capacity to turn your friends and enemies into sims who live in your city and follow their lives and careers. Likewise there is pleasure to be had in feeling more like you're actually running a real city than ever before – trading off a toxic waste dump for better medical care is a decision that seems to come straight out of the real-world local papers.

However, the most notable innovation is one that allows you to 'link' your cities together to build up a larger world. Filling in whole regions will become a necessity as allotted space runs out. Limited links between these sites can be used to create benefits for the whole conurbation.

SimCity 4 might sit right down among the many footnotes in the history of gaming, but it fills its remit with skill, creating a game that genuinely demands something of our oft-neglected intellect.



Edge rating: Seven out of ten









There's a nod to agriculture in this iteration of *SimCity*, with the traditional light industrial zoning being replaced by farmlands







While it'll take some effort to balance the books, there are some ludicrous things to spend money on once you get going, including huge palaces for yourself. The actual building of a city is easier than ever before, with electricity and water supplies acting more like you'd expect from your infrastructure



Where's my polygon?

There were some questions as to why, given the capabilities of the high-end PCs, the *SimCity 4* engine should remain in a 2D view. The answer is obvious in the game itself: while it does use a generally 3D environment, a free camera would have been too demanding for the amount of detail on offer. *SimCity 4* requires a big PC.

Taiko No Tatsujin

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,980 (£35)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

One by one the Japanese rhythm action developers tick off the instruments they have recreated in plastic. The genre shows little sign of slowing down in Japanese arcades and the latest home port comes from Namco. *Taiko No Tatsujin* (drum expert), a game based on the practice of kumi daiko (modern taiko drumming) first appeared in the arcades in 2000 and this is the first in the series to wind its way onto the home console.

The premise will be familiar to genre fans: beat the drum in a variety of ways in time with onscreen indications to earn points and unlock songs. As per usual you earn higher points for hitting the beat dead on, while being a little early or late will garner fewer points and missing the beat altogether a penalty. Should you fail to meet a predetermined quota of accurate hits during the song, it's game over. The physical action is varied by virtue of mixing up standard hits with rim shots, drum rolls and staccato hits and by dividing the drum in two allowing for left and right directions.

So far so samba. Indeed, we are at the stage now where the core gameplay of the genre is so defined that one's enjoyment of any particular title depends entirely on one's affinity with the peripheral. That said, Namco's taiko drum (affectionately known as the TaTa-con) is well constructed and sturdy. There is little danger of breaking drum skins here – a valid concern when attempting the higher difficulty settings.

With 30 musical offerings to bang the drum to, ranging from 'Pomp and Circumstance' to the theme from *Klonoa 2* there is much to see here, especially as each track is featured in three difficulty levels. Unfortunately the majority of the music is made up of current Japanese anime themes and hits and so the visual jokes will appeal to only the most dedicated cultural importer and for many the familiar classical pieces will initially be most enjoyable.

The difficulty is well paced and despite the text-heavy presentation the game is accessible to both the importer and casual gamer alike – important as the chances of this title and its peripheral finding their way into PAL hands is slim. Ironically, given the extreme Japanese presentation, it's an excellent title to introduce to non-gaming friends demonstrating again how the genre continually transcends cultures by virtue of its core universal gameplay.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









If you are fortunate, or wealthy, enough to acquire a second taiko drum then the rhythmic duelling possibilities are enthralling



Whacky races

The game features two minigames, both requiring drum roll dexterity. In the first you race a wheel-enhanced taiko drum against a variety of competitors at the 100 metres. The faster you drum the faster you run.

The second minigame is more complicated and takes the form of a marathon. Here you must alternate standard hits with rim shots at a steady pace – not too fast and not too slow in order to pace your drum persona. It's *Track and Field* meets *Bishi-Bashi* except here the old thumb-in-sleeve trick won't be helping you.





Taiko No Tatsujin has already reached its third instalment in the arcades, and its success emphasises the continued popularity of the genre in Japan. A PS2 sequel is scheduled for late March/early April

Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **ESP** Developer: **Treasure** Price: **¥4,800 (£24)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



You can move around the arena to trap your opponent with the directional button, and it's possible to keep track of your position with the meter on the left-hand side







This popular manga tale follows the reclusive student Ippo Makanuchi who learns to box his way to self-esteem. Unlike Kodansha's pseudo-realistic PS2 version, otaku's favourite, Treasure, takes the arcade route for this GBA iteration. The game is seen through a firstperson perspective, albeit with a fixed camera, but despite the visual similarities this is no simple derivative of *Super Punch Out!!*.

Strikes are achieved by pressing the single punch button in conjunction with a direction, while blocking is handled with the B button. Stand still and you block automatically, though it's easy for the opponent to break this stance if you hold it too long. The combo system flows well and once you break through the opponent's defence it's possible to string together an impressive series of hits, ending with a special (spirit).

Visually the game is wonderful, large characters are fluidly animated, Treasure demonstrating its mastery of the 2D medium. With five game modes, ten playable characters each with their own specials and the option to create an additional ten boxers using the points you earn, it's a packed package that provides a fresh, glorious take on the 2D boxing genre.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of **ten**

Kakuto Chojin

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Dream Publishing** Price: **$50 (£30)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E112**

It's difficult to see just how *Kakuto Chojin* managed to vaunt itself as a technical demo prior to the Xbox launch, considering just how little actual flourish is present. Overly waxen character models jitterbug awkwardly around one another, occasionally splashed in a 20-watt lighting effect or a sprinkle of sparks, and the amount of imagination present in the dank, industrial arena design is pathetic. How can a game hope to convey martial arts combat if it can't get even the basic science right?

It's equally difficult to see just how such fluid, flamboyant forms as jeet kune do and capoeira end up feeling so lacklustre and constipated in play. Beat 'em ups, though often little more than costume dramas of scissors-paper-stone, can be engaging, riotous experiences, but *Kakuto Chojin* lacks anything of note, redeeming or otherwise. In fact, it's downright appalling; cobbled, not crafted, and can be beaten with a single, repetitive button press.

A stab at innovation would usually constitute an excuse for an otherwise diabolical title, but in *Kakuto Chojin* there are no puncture wounds, just lots of internal bleeding.

Edge rating: **Two** out of **ten**









Survival mode constitutes a mêlée rumble, much like the combat sections of *Shenmue* but expectedly they're just as limp and broken as the oneplayer campaign proper

Sega Rally Championship

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega Rosso** Price: **¥4,800 (£24)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E**116





Link play is available and does make things more interesting but anyone expecting *Sega Rally* on GBA to deliver a similar experience to its arcade or Saturn incarnations will be disappointed (CPU opponents also tend to get in your way). Ultimately, your money could be better spent on something else





The Game Boy Advance has an abundance of rally titles, and while none can match the reputation Sega's off-road racer has acquired since its 1995 coin-op debut, a couple can certainly provide a more fulfilling handheld experience than this iteration.

Handling is the biggest setback here. In a sport where cars spend most of their time dancing on tarmac, gravel and snow there is very little feeling of cadence conveyed in Sega Rosso's game. Some difference can be observed from one vehicle to the next but none comes close to the dynamic offered by *V-Rally 3*, for instance. Visually, at times *Sega Rally Championship* is a pixellated mess, particularly during desert stages, and scenery popup is constantly noticeable.

On the plus side, the sense of speed is good and the structure – which has you buying championships, tracks, cars, *Sega Rally*-related artwork (such as title screen and arcade cabinet shots) with cash earned from racing and radio-control minigames – is at least appealing. The game also provides a decent challenge, one of the elements that impaired *V-Rally 3*'s otherwise dominance of the handheld rally market. That handling, however, simply isn't up to scratch.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Phantasy Star Collection

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Digital Eclipse** Price: **$35 (£21)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

RPGs have perhaps the longest shelf lives of all games: nothing endures quite as well as a good story well told. *PSC* has been done before but, unlike the Saturn version, unfortunately we lose the fourth iteration, leaving only the preceding three games on GBA. It's a case of straightforward emulation. Unlike Square's recent graphical overhaul of the early *Final Fantasy* titles on Wonderswan, Sega's flagship RPG titles come to GBA in the exact form they took on their respective SMS ('87) and Mega Drive ('89, '91) origins.

Digital Eclipse's GBA translations are impossible to differentiate from the source material – and, besides the pseudo-futuristic settings, all three titles, although competently executed, have since been easily overshadowed. *Phantasy Star* was probably the most groundbreaking game in its time, tightly squeezing the hardware, but the epic generational third game is arguably the best of the set, retrospectively speaking. However, graphically and plot-wise it all feels tired in today's climate. Undoubtedly this is a package filled with value and historic charm, but viewed devoid of nostalgic mist, the earliest instalments of the series feel little more than average.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









The package in many ways documents elements that were already quickly becoming genre and series conventions. For the *Phantasy Star Online* player today it's a great chance to spend the first mesetas on the first monomates



The making of...

Body Harvest

It started life as a one-page design document in Dundee, almost became an RPG in Kyoto and was finally transformed into a free-roaming thirdperson precursor to GTAIII; it's DMA Design's Body Harvest...

At the age of one a child is on its feet and quite ready to walk around destroying things. In contrast, it took DMA Design nearly four years to prepare its own free-roaming rampage. *Body Harvest* is the sum total of all your fears. Not the game, but the nightmare of its development.

The *Body Harvest* story begins a long time ago, in a small development house just outside Dundee. In 1995 Nintendo saw great potential in a game design document drawn up by DMA Design. After initial negotiations the softco was given the green light to go into immediate development. Unfortunately, when DMA's largely inexperienced team sobered-up, it was faced with a tricky problem: its design document consisted of a single picture of an upturned car and a bug. What exactly was it going to develop?

After two years of hard slog DMA eventually presented an action game to Nintendo. Unsurprisingly, it was not what Nintendo had seen in the design document and more importantly, it was not to its taste. A crack team of Nintendo experts,





Original format: **Nintendo 64**
Publisher: **Gremlin**
Developer: **DMA Design**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1998**



By the time *Body Harvest* was released, its engine was obsolete and the visuals suffered in comparison with other N64 games

including a producer from the *Zelda* series, flew over to sort out the mess. It was suggested that the game be reincarnated as an RPG – not what DMA wanted to hear. For the following year, Nintendo worked closely with the developer. **Richard Ralfe**, *Body Harvest's* designer, describes it as a turbulent time. "[Nintendo's] input was greatly appreciated, but provided massive headaches for us – its focus for the game was very different from the original concept." At the time the N64 was missing a big RPG and was being embarrassingly outsold by the PlayStation. Nintendo made plans for *Body Harvest* to plug the crucial RPG space and DMA grudgingly accepted. "We had problems with their reasoning initially, but after sitting down and discussing the possibilities we came on board." A series of strange meetings ensued with a Japanese interpreter translating peculiar sci-fi terminology. With DMA's broad Scottish accents the tense collaboration was at least lined with comedy. Sadly, things weren't improving very fast and Nintendo didn't see the funny side.

"DMA's design document consisted of a single picture of an upturned car and a bug. What exactly was it going to develop?"

In a desperate attempt to get the project back on track, the core team at DMA was invited to visit Nintendo's HQ in Kyoto, Japan. On arrival they were lined up along one side of a long table with some of Nintendo's top players standing opposite. "The atmosphere was somewhat fret," explains *Body Harvest's* producer and lead programmer **John White**. "They basically detailed how they wanted us to redesign the entire game."

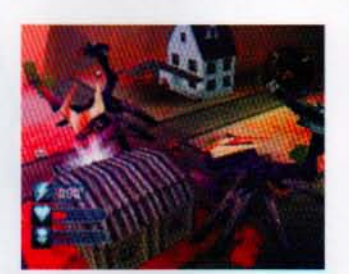
The grilling continued for two and a half weeks, but White doesn't recall the team being overly troubled, "We didn't know what was going on. We were just overjoyed at being in Japan for two weeks." It was White's first position as a lead programmer and most of the team were also new to their roles, so working from Nintendo's HQ was a fascinating experience.

Based next to the developers of *Star Fox*, they were inspired by their methods. "We got to see their whole design approach and it just amazed us – they had a large room with Post-it notes covering practically every inch of wall space." All their design documents were also in the room, which was the epicentre of the design process. DMA probably refrained from sharing its own design document.

When Nintendo felt that DMA had suffered enough, the team was taken out to dinner in a traditional Japanese restaurant. Miyamoto-san was present but he didn't say much and looked somewhat solemn – probably still searching for meaning in the profound image of bug and car.

More bad news

On its return home, DMA noticed a distinct pattern emerging – more bad news. *Body Harvest* was being developed alongside another game called *Zenith* – an original mix of platform and racing action. *Zenith* was to be canned and several people were given the unpleasantly singular option of joining the *Body Harvest* project. It was a difficult situation and White found himself "trying to motivate people who didn't want to be motivated." When tensions reached breaking point, about ten people decided to leave en masse. White describes the episode as "a lot of fun," in the same way that crashing your car





Lead programmer John White accepts that *Body Harvest's* graphics were a problem, "We tried to do so much that we ended up spreading the butter a bit low on the bread"









The film 'Starship Troopers' was released mid-development and was conveniently associated with the game. In reality though, it had little impact on the developer

is a lot of fun. It is easy to imagine that *Body Harvest* may never have reached completion without White's intrinsic skills of diplomacy. Finally, the game took form as a free-roaming thirdperson shooter, with a vast array of vehicles and weapons. Aliens had grown accustomed to harvesting humans, one year at a time in different places across the Earth. You had been sent back through time to extinguish the invading aliens as they attacked.

Kill me now

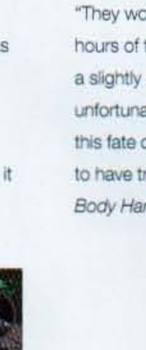
Body Harvest received very mixed reactions from both critics and gamers. One amateur reviewer simply commented, "Kill me now." While another claimed, "It plays like an absolute dream and is filled with wonderfully innovative ideas. Five Stars." While most would argue the latter is far closer to the truth, the confused reactions are a reflection of the then unfamiliar free-roaming game design. Although the team is too modest to agree, *Body Harvest* is likely to have influenced some great games including *GTAIII*. Sadly, the most painful reaction came from Nintendo itself, which made it clear that it didn't want the game. Instead, Gremlin Interactive bought it as part of a deal in which it took over DMA.

When the game was finally released, it happened to hit the shelves in the same month as *Zelda* and *Banjo-Kazooie*. "We knew we were dead in the water," says White. Regardless, *Body Harvest* found a good following, spending several weeks in the top ten N64 chart – a considerable achievement against such competition. Crucially though, in terms of overall sales, the game failed to dent the all-formats chart. "It was a bitter disappointment after four years' work," says White. Since DMA started work on the project the tides had turned firmly against it. The N64 market was on its last legs and competition from PlayStation was intense. It seems that lady luck had left them some four years earlier.

Older and wiser

With so many trials and errors, the *Body Harvest* team must at least have learned more than those producing the many formulaic games of the time. Looking back, the team is its own worst critic and can expertly dissect its mistakes. "It was a horrible case of overambition," says White. "We didn't have any idea of what we were getting into at the start." Ralfe agrees: "*Body Harvest* had so many components on the go at the same time that simply allocating tasks to people became akin to solving a Newtonian equation."

He also points to a lack of structure in the development team. "Quite honestly, we pretty much sorted out the roles and responsibilities as we went." Meeting the *Star Fox* team must have been like Ricky Gervais meeting his new boss in 'The Office'. Less of the arrogant idiocy, yet still an element of comedy.



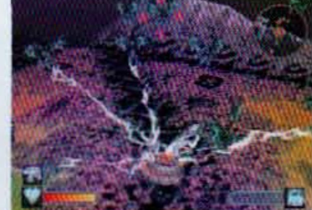
White says that a lack of planning was the Achilles' heel of the project. "I've learned to have a much better idea of what you want to do before you start," he says. "I think that saves about a year." When work continued into its third year, an irreversible problem surfaced. *Body Harvest* was locked into an ageing engine which couldn't match the graphically rich games then being released on the N64. When the game was released, it didn't sell itself on its visuals.

Some more dedicated fans may also have noticed the odd glitch. White puts this down to internal play testing. "People who made the game should have nothing to do with it," he says. He also notes that, although *Body Harvest* generally plays well, there were some "glaring faults."

For example, it was actually possible to be killed by a save point. At one particularly creative stage in the game, a missile would land to mark the successful completion of a stage. However, gamers unlucky enough to be standing in a particular spot would be blown out into the ocean where they would slowly drown. "They would then have to replay two hours of the game," White notes with a slightly nervous laugh. Gamers unfortunate enough to have suffered this fate could consider themselves to have truly taken part in the *Body Harvest* experience.







When a confused Japanese interpreter claimed that Nintendo didn't like the look of the aliens in *Body Harvest*, a major re-design began. Then, several months later, Nintendo commented that the aliens had lost their wonderfully unique look. The artists "weren't best pleased"

Pac-Man

Format: Coin-op Publisher: Midway Developer: Namco Release: 1980



A quick bite on a power pill and the ghosts don't look so clever. If you really need to, the warp tunnel on the maze's side can be used if you're in trouble

Meet Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Clyde. Ghosts they may be, but their colourful and cute aesthetic certainly paints them as some of the seemingly most inoffensive adversaries to arcade videogamers currently around. Then again Pac-Man, the canary yellow circular character embodied by the player, doesn't look particularly menacing.

Of course, appearances are often deceitful – Pac-Man, as you immediately realise once the game begins, is a single-minded glutton, an unstoppable eating machine that gobbles up the dots lining the maze mapped out on the screen with prolific voraciousness. Your opponents are no less determined however, chasing you around the monitor with incessant resolve. Get caught and lose a life. Lose three and insert another coin.

Unless you've reached the 10,000 points required to earn an extra Pac-Man, of course. An impossibility given the lowly reward from eating dots? Hardly. Four power pills per screen allow you to turn the tables on your pursuers and be offered the time-limited chance of gobbling them up – they tend to scatter pretty sharpish but clever use of the maze should see you degustating all four for maximum points (once eaten they race off to the centre from where they remerge for more pursuing). Further points can be obtained by snapping up the special fruit that appears momentarily in the centre of the screen while clearing a level obviously also brings some numerical reward.

And that's essentially all there is to it. The beautifully economy of control (a single joystick is used for the four directional inputs required) and relentless nature of the proceedings mask a dangerously addictive experience. True, the game's repetitive character eventually hinders longevity while the behaviour of the ghosts is occasionally erratic. Still, a remarkably simple concept but one that is unique and immensely rewarding in succinct doses.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Lunchtime filler

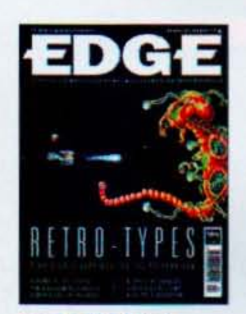
Like so many classic videogaming experiences, *Pac-Man*'s appeal remains largely intact, even after two decades of continuous gameplay development. Its hold on players is not that of *Tetris*, certainly, but it can still provide an enticing alternative to many of today's titles while gobbling up 30 minutes of anyone's lunchtime with delightful ease.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 57, April 1998

It's funny how things work out. One of the lead features in **E**57 was a look at Rage, timed to coincide with the emergence of next-gen *Missile Command*, *Incoming*. That would be the first title it'd self-publish. The brilliant *Rocky* would be the last, consumer apathy when presented with mediocrity (*Beckham*) and excellence (*Hostile Waters*) hastening about its ruin. "We're very nervous about getting involved in the console business," said Rage founder Paul Finnegan. Five years later, the company would be dead on its feet. Funny, but not ha-ha funny.

On a happier note, early '98 was an excellent time for games, high-scoring reviews of *1080°*, *FF Tactics*, *Battlezone* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga* demonstrating quality across all formats. An overly enthusiastic look at *R-Type* ("Ten years old and still the king of shoot 'em ups"?) confirmed **Edge**'s retro/hardcore credentials, and console fetishists would appreciate Out There's requiem for Apple's Pippin (just 42,000 sales in Japan and the US). Numedia, meanwhile, continued in an interactively oblivious vein, welcoming portable DVD players and Madonna's new album.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

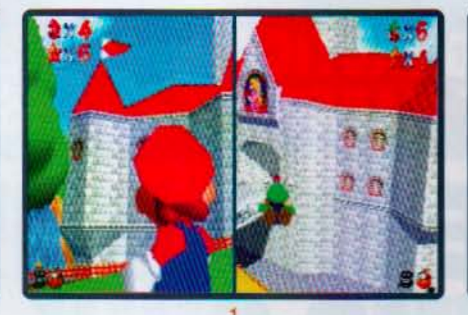
"We now believe some people perceive it contains a reference to drugs." Sony responds to criticism of its *Cool Boarders 2* 'powder' campaign, which appeared in lifestyle mags.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"*Super Mario DD* is essentially an add-on to the original game and will feature simultaneous, interactive twoplayer action." There's a fine line between April Fool's jokes and outright prickteasing, **Edge**.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

1080° Snowboarding (8/10, N64); *Battlezone* (9/10, PC); *Final Fantasy Tactics* (9/10, PS); *Burning Rangers* (8/10, Saturn); *Panzer Dragoon Saga* (9/10, Saturn); *Redline Racer* (7/10, PC); *Bomberman World* (7/10, PS); *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* (8/10, PS); *F1 '97* (7/10, PC)


1


2



3


4


5


6

1. **Edge** still gets letters asking about *Super Mario DD*. Oops
2. An unassuming prescreen appearance for Treasure's *Radiant Silvergun*
3. The PocketStation is announced
4. GOD founder Mike Wilson. Smooth
5. Cover star *R-type*, subject of an **Edge** 'study'
6. *1080° Snowboarding*: old, but still king of the slopes

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Cat Channon, Take 2 PR manager and ex-Videator, recalls Donkey Kong Country





While working in retail, Channon became beguiled by Rare's 'advanced computer modelling'

Shoes. Handbags. Platform games. It's not that I'm deliberately trying to conform to every female stereotype, but it just seems to have happened that way. So, asked to pick just one game that's 'pixel perfect', its genre was inevitable. It was *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES that first demonstrated the potential of the early consoles in the hands of platform pioneers. It may be as much to do with timing (I encountered the game when I was paid to sit in a games shop all day and enjoy just such entertainment) as the cute character animations, sprawling levels, and the ingenious level design, that make it my game of choice. But despite the fact that *DKC* was only Rare's second SNES venture, its years of 8bit Nintendo experience had obviously been well spent.

DKC exemplified the new wave of gaming. At a time when there still existed a gaping gulf between the visual standards of arcade machines and cart consoles, *DKC* singlehandedly bridged the gap – for the first time a game actually deserved its 'next-generation' hyperbole. If only, in retrospect, for the super-sleek graphics once thought impossible on a 16bit system. Although in structural terms a typical 2D platformer, this island adventure fraught with danger and excitement kept me entertained for months. Even after completion I'd go back and replay my favourite levels again.



Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

So GameCube 2, PlayStation3 and Xbox 2 are all penned in for a 2005 release, in Japan at least. I cannot speak for the rest of the games enthusiasts out there, but I consider this to be a bit of a kick in the teeth. Whenever a raft of these monstrous machines come out, they're hyped to the teeth (usually using vaguely impressive tech specs instead of details of groundbreaking games) and we promptly snap them up at a ludicrous prices, only to see the price drop, along with our hearts.

What do we really get for our money? The ability to play the latest selection of average franchise games, the odd genre-beater and a whole truckload of wasted IP. Oh sure, we get numerous hours of enjoyment out of them, but then I also get hours of enjoyment out of my video without having to upgrade to a new format every four years.

Although it's now a multi-billion dollar industry, or more than likely because of this, the needs and desires of the consumers seem to be tertiary to the 'grab the money and run' ethos of the big players and their cronies in retail. I'm not naive, I know the aim of a business is to make money, but the increasing speed with which we're being asked to upgrade our PCs and games consoles is a joke when compared to the benefits.

And the industry is suffering too. The rush to consolidate all these little companies into a few big ones is leading to the destruction of great teams. Westwood, having had its creative flair knocked out of it by EA's 'franchise is king' mentality, has now been dissolved. And that's just one of many sob stories. Why doesn't the industry just slow down and concentrate on the latest hardware generations?
Dale Price

Welcome to the videogame industry Dale. But you are, of course, right. Judging by the news reports in this issue and the last issue of **Edge**, there is already an unhealthy number of publishers and developers who are regretting their reliance on spreadsheet logic at the expense of properly focusing on the wants and needs of their consumers. Perhaps though, one positive outcome of the introduction of new hardware platforms is that it might spur the industry into learning from such mistakes. Although judging by previous platform transitions, that might be a tad over-optimistic.

Your leading article 'The State of Play Nation' (**E**120) made interesting reading regarding the current difficulties experienced by the videogame industry. However, I feel **Edge**, and the games industry in general is missing a very big point that seems patently clear from your report: games are too long.

According to your article, there are a small number of titles that sell incredibly well, and everything else tends to be overlooked. *GTA: Vice City* is currently the most successful of these titles. I've been playing this game for over 30 hours now, and I've only completed 56 per cent of the game. Will it really take me 60 hours to finish the entire game? Surely it's no surprise that people aren't buying as many games as they were in the PSone days (as suggested by PS2's lower tie-ratio). It seems that with the exception of a few notable titles (such as *Rez* and *Ikaruga*), every game currently being developed is a huge life-consuming epic, that demands anywhere between 15 and 50 hours of your free time to properly experience.

Given that the average gamer is aged 24–35, is in full time employment and probably has many other interests and a social life, where are they going to find time to complete these behemoths? Even the typical **Edge** reader only manages to play games for an average of 11 hours 35 minutes a week (**E**114, September 2002).

Shorter games would be quicker to develop, cost less to produce and importantly ought to cost the same price as a DVD to buy. The variety this would engender, coupled with the more affordable price of games would attract more people to play games, leading to higher sales, bigger profits and increased capital to invest in developing new ideas.

Greater diversity could also bring more wome into games and a move away from the narrow 18-28 year old demographic as the subject matters, concepts and game types diversify outside of the terribly dull testosterone-soaked focus of violence, sci-fi, tits and cars.

The creator of Tecmo's *Dead or Alive* series, Tomonobu Itagaki has previously said he'd like to make a really intense game that could be completed in three hours. It would be like having the best bits of your favourite game, only without all the dull moments and pointless time-wasting devices cynically inserted to extend the game's li

So-called 'hardcore' gamers (whoever they ar may baulk at the idea of shorter games, but thes are the people who stand to benefit the most. There would be more games, they would be cheaper, more challenging, more original, and mo diverse.See my games Website for a full length feature on this subject: www.digital-playground.co.uk
Louis Badcock

A well-reasoned argument; the issue of game length has not gone undebated on these pages, and it's imperative that the videogame industry does establish a broader audience if it is to bene from a more sustainable financial structure. **Edg** itself is not fundamentally opposed to lengthy titl such as *GTA* or *Final Fantasy*, but it would be interesting to see the videogame industry enterta a debate about variable pricing for games that d to offer a shorter experience. As for Tomonobu Itagaki, well as this issue's review of *DoAX* show he should be commended for being prepared to take creative risks. Talking of which…

Edge's continual condemnation of developers (especially western developers) for sticking with supposed proven formulas in the fa of innovation is patently ridiculous.

"Shorter games would be quicker to develop, cost less to produce and ought to cost the same price as a DVD to buy. The variety this would engender would attract more people"



Argentum Online; not developed or published by NGD Studios as **Edge** noted in E118, but in fact developed by Noland Studios. Oops. Sorry

As someone who has pitched games to most if not all of the major American publishers, from the big players such as Microsoft, Ubi Soft, Activision and Acclaim right down to the likes of Sammy and Bam! Interactive, the ball has always been in the publishers' court.

The publishers control the content. The publishers hold the purse strings. The publishers choose which projects and ideas to invest in and the publishers choose which projects to bring to market and how to advertise them. Developers rarely have the cash to bring their ideas to anything approximating a finished product with high-end development costs sitting around the $2m mark even for games with short development times.

Most publishers will say they want 'innovation and great games' over proven formulas, but they still have to sit in a green light meeting and convince their own boss that it'll make money. The request is usually: show me something completely original and then give me examples of games that are exactly the same and have sold a million units.

The difference between the east and the west is that the publishers are almost always also developers. Konami, Capcom, Nintendo and Sony are all publishers *and* developers. It's a much easier task to pitch within your own company than it is to float a risky idea with a complete stranger, often on the other side of the world.

If any developers deserve a slap in the face it's those who have made their millions, like Square or Blizzard, and who continue to simply clone their own products (albeit wrapped up in high production values) instead of trying to stretch the boundaries of the medium.

If **Edge** truly wants to get into this issue, it's time to take a stance and take a shot at those developers who not only *should* be changing their release schedules but who also have the in-house funds to do it.

Alex Hutchinson, Torus Games

Edge had thought its stance on this was already clear, but evidently not. First, we sympathise with the plight of developers, and, in general, don't apportion any blame to them for a lack of innovation. Instead we, like you, acknowledge the endemic risk aversion that characterises the publishing community and lays the blame firmly at its feet, and at the feet of a financing structure that currently entrenches the reliance of developers on publishers for funding.

Second, **Edge** doesn't champion the cause of innovation per se – a title such as *Warcraft III* is surely evidence that evolution is frequently just as effective. But we do acknowledge the need for the publishing community to address a broader audience in the interest of sustaining long-term growth in both economic and cultural terms.

Your article 'Game of Chance' was a fascinating read, which no doubt many of the developers in this industry can relate to (myself included).

I hope people take note and really research this industry that they are so desperate to get into. They will find the industry full of uncertainties and very poor long-term job prospects. It's all too common to turn up for work one day to find that you have no job and are being made redundant after a project has been completed (or canned). I myself was lucky last year, since I only got made redundant once; friends of mine had it worse.

I got my break over a decade ago at a time when the only news you heard was good news about the industry. Now with so many companies suffering I don't see it as the break I once did. And with every development company within commuting distance making redundancies, I face the prospect of relocation or following many good developer friends in moving to a different industry.

With many publishers only funding a project with experienced people at the helm and throughout the team, if enough of those experienced people start leaving the industry in sufficient numbers then developers will have real problems building new teams. This industry really needs to grow up; most people I know do worry about the long-term prospects at the company they are working for and need more from the industry.

Far too many jobs (even companies) rely on the success of a single product, and are affected by the delay of even a single milestone payment. With the success rate of most products low and with funding of new original games getting harder all the time not only are jobs being lost but also the creation of new jobs could also suffer.

Anon

I am upset about a mistake in your 'Global Underground' feature (**E**118). You wrote that the Argentinian game *Argentum Online* was made by NGD Studios. NGD has nothing to do with the game, which was actually developed by many people all over the world (including Argentina, Spain, Mexico and USA) using the Internet as a development environment. As project leader on the title I feel very bad that you have credited our game to a corporation that was not involved at all, and I am pretty sure that a lot of people from our community would feel just as aggrieved.

In the last week, the project has become in an open source one. For more information you can visit http://sourceforge.net/projects/morgoao and download the whole source code of the project. The official Website of the game is www.argentumonline.com.ar. The game is in its final beta stages and it will remain free, and we are also working in the game's sequel; www.ao2.com.ar

I hope, somehow, you can correct this misunderstanding that has caused so much trouble to us.

Pablo Ignacio Márquez, Noland Studios

Apologies Pablo. Consider **Edge** suitably chastened. We can only apologise for our mistake, and we hope that **Edge** readers will check out your Websites to see the games for themselves.

"It's all too common in this industry to turn up for work one day to find that you have no job and are being made redundant after a project has been completed (or canned)"

from the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet (http://forum.edge-online.com)

Subject: **Generative Level Design**
Poster: **Thraktor**

I'm sure we've all seen the random level generators in *Worms*, *Age of Empires*, etc, but I have yet to see a program which actually, taking into account how the game works, designs levels specifically to play well, yet still be generated entirely by the computer. For instance, it wouldn't be too hard at all to create a program that threw together random level segments to make a *Quake III* level, but it's a whole different business to make a program that will actually design good *Quake III* levels. Personally I think this is an incredibly interesting subject, as it is only when we have to tell something else (in this case a computer) how to make good games that we think about what makes these games good.

Poster: **tadhgk**

There's a huge difference between random level generation and good level creation. With random generation, you can get crap ones or accidental brilliance and hope, through setting some useful rules, that your game won't create impossible ones. As you say, generating a 3D level should be the same kind of thing, but with a z-dimension.

However, design is not the same task as generation. How can you program a computer to account for pace, for example? Or style? Or to try and meld various elements together to create themed environments? Perhaps using some sort of bot scheme that tries and tries and tries until an evolutionary-code sort of engine produces an ideal level with the right amount of difficulty, etc?

I'm inclined to be cynical, not least because at its base I think great level design requires a numinous quality. The evolutionary system appeals on a functional level, but it doesn't allow for leaps of the imagination, and there's the crux of its faults.

Poster: **Thraktor**

I would definitely agree with the fact that it would be near-impossible for a computer to create themed levels, and hence (as I believe atmosphere plays a large part) great levels, I still think it would be possible for a computer to make levels as well designed as the average human-made one, providing there was enough intelligent human input and research into the creation of the program.

I think I may not quite have been clear enough about the difference between a computer generating a random level (as in many 2D games, such as *Worms*) and actually designing a level specifically for it to be good (as you would need in pretty much any 3D game where the environment plays an important role). While randomly generating a level is just that, a completely random blob of terrain, a game such as *Quake III*, as I described above, requires a great deal of thought (or computation) put into how it works, which means looking at how the game itself works and how the level effects play. Given that we're going with that example, I'll explain how I'd go about the problem.

In my opinion, the basics of a *Quake III* level can be divided down into movement paths and line of sight from those paths, basically moving and shooting, with item/weapon/spawn placement taken into consideration too. So, after looking extensively at existing *Quake III* levels, noting what works and what doesn't, I would take all this into account while writing some algorithms to generate a movement path map for the level. Then, with yet more research in mind, I'd get the computer to generate a line-of-sight map from this, essentially working out what's solid and what's not. Weapons, spawns, etc, would then all be placed, keeping in mind the previous two steps accounted for their placement. Then, the hardest part, would be actually turning this wire mesh into an aesthetically pleasing level, meaning huge amounts of prefabricated bits, with varying styles, etc.

That sort of approach is a huge difference from randomly generated levels, as the key is to look carefully at how the game plays and what makes levels enjoyable to play, then turning it into C++ code and hence into a computer-made level.

Poster: **Kid Tripod**

You'd have to make some sort of expert system to do that. Really what you describe isn't easy at all. Some of my AI lecturers were having fun working out how best to design golf clubs, and others things like the wing shape on planes. A game lev is a step of complexity beyond those, and I can't even begin to think the kind of rules you'd have t come up with. One approach would be genetic algorithms, but you'd need to create a way of quantifying how 'good' a level actually is. Once y work out what it is that makes a good level such system would write itself (literally), but if we knew what that was all levels would be brilliantly designed already.

Subject: **Boss fights**
Poster: **Great Briton**

The very mechanic of them... are they stunting th design of games due to their expectation, are the a stumbling block, necessary in some but not in where did they come from... hero's journey I guess?

Poster: **Donkey81**

Some of the most ridiculous implementations of the boss fight are in *Metal Gear Solid* and its sequel. The whole game is supposed to be base around stealth and a realistic plot. And then, you have to stand there, blasting this stupid woman over and over again until she dies. For me, the boss-fights spoiled *MGS* and *MGS2*. They were completely out of place.

Poster: **afronaut81**

There are some games – *Metroid Fusion*, *Shado Warriors*, *Zelda*, *Probotector* where the thrill of entering a boss battle is one of the key parts of t experience. The tension that builds as the boss makes his entrance and the swift death (most lik on a first encounter), followed by an immediate return to the battle make some boss battles phenomenal. The only major gripe I have is the 'levelling up' scenario (where it's not worth enteri a battle unless you have a certain stat level) whic is pathetic. Boss battles – as you point out –

"It is only when we have to tell something else (in this case a computer) how to make good games that we really think about what makes these games good"







Is Ryo homosexual, or just the dullest straightman in existence? It's a question that's been perplexing Photek for some time. Meanwhile, the debate over the value of boss fights rages again. *MGS2* was a poorer game because of them, argues Donkey81

should test players' abilities with a new item or the mastery of existing moves. Looking to *Ocarina of Time* – which has possibly the best bosses I've encountered – it exhibits these key tests.

Subject: **Does the *Shenmue* series mainly appeal to gay people? [No offence]**
Poster: **Photek**

I had the first one on my lovely DC but I never had an attachment to the main character and didn't enjoy the game as a result. I mean, I should have, after all, I loved ickle Link in all his reincarnations and he's an elf boy blokey thing. Ryo 'seems' a little soft for my liking. I'm no jack the lad (far from it) but Snake and Sam from *Splinter Cell* seem easier to connect with. Is it because of my hetero-ness that I couldn't connect with Mr Ryo?

Poster: **PeteL**

Ryo is far too generic to be fancied by anyone much, I should think. Even though they're barely games, the *Shenmue* series needs to be loved by all people who love games. It is Yu Suzuki's love letter to videogames: to the joys of wandering, to the incomparable compulsion of old-skool twitch gaming (QTE/Old arcades), to the whole charm of game characters and the pop art genius of game design (the collectibles) to the technical majesty of the DC and the possibilities of the future. If you don't like it, it doesn't guarantee you are straight. Rather it indicates that, though you undoubtedly like games loads, you're probably not actually capable of loving them.

Poster: **Miyamoto's Evil Twin**

Whether he's gay or not doesn't matter to me. I'd have no problem playing a gay character. It's just that he's so dull, defined only by the death of his dad, and seems almost completely soulless.

Poster: **Photek**

Doh me! I failed to inform you guys that my gay mate loves it and thinks that Ryo is definitely gay. He just says he can tell. I don't understand either.

Poster: **DJ Sack**

Ryo in the dojo with fuku-san:
Fuku: Will you spar with me? I need the practice.
Ryo: Let's get sweaty!
And the way he has no emotions about Naomi, although I feel this is done so you have the emotions, like when you have to pick the picture in the original *Shenmue*. Do you take the one of you two close, or let her take it?

Poster: **welsh**

Ryo's definitely not gay, just the dullest straight man in existence. He doesn't even qualify as a blank canvas. There's just bugger all to identify with yourself with Ryo. I only live through his adventure because it happens to take part in a gorgeous part of town, taking in some entertaining people along the way. Ren, for example, is just way cooler than Ryo. If anything, he doesn't fancy Ren; he's just bemused and fascinated by how non-boring the fella is.

Topic: **Edge's arrogance**
Poster: **nasanu**

Is it just me or is **Edge** heading in the wrong direction? I used to really trust **Edge** and believe its reviews but over recent issues that trust has been lost. There are many little things that have contributed to this and I'll give you two examples from **E**119. The first is Reset:

"... a franchise (*Army Men*) synonymous with massmarket nonsense. Talking of which, *GT* scored a 10."

GT is massmarket nonsense? Give me a break. If **Edge** feels this way then why rate the *GT* games so highly in the reviews? Just a childish comment you'd expect to find in an Xbox or GameCube magazine, not **Edge**.

Then there is the *Resident Evil 0* review:
We all know how much **Edge** has bashed the *RE* controls and formula. But in this review it has to hide to say "for those who don't have any irrational aversions to the formula, this prequel is another..."

Irrational aversions? If we don't like *RE* then we are irrational? Well fuck you too **Edge**. Again this is just childish. If you don't agree with us we will call you names...

Poster: **Edo Sensei**

God! (Sigh). Try to take in what you read, not just let it slip straight through your head without processing it. As for the *GT* nonsense they were being ironic! Two franchises, both of massmarket appeal selling loads yet one is very good and the other is fairly crap. Therefore, do you actually need to bother making a 'good' game.

The *RE* comment has gone by you too! They are just pointing out that it's the same clunky control mechanism that has plagued the previous games, but if that never bothered you then go ahead. How would you like them to write the review? In plainly boring English? That's what makes it an interesting read. By buying a copy, they are not saying you have to agree with their opinion, it's just their opinion delivered to you... interestingly!

Poster: **dug**

Dear **Edge**,

I have become concerned of late about your recent propensity to print opinions which differ from mine. This is, of course, foolish in the extreme because, as anyone with even a modicum of intelligence knows, mine is the only opinion that counts.

This problem on its own would not be enough to cause me to write to you, but there is a further, even greater one within your pages. Over the last few issues, I have noticed on several occasions sentences (or even whole paragraphs) which, when wilfully misinterpreted, seem to insult me and other sections of your readership who share my views.

If these practices do not stop I shall have no choice but to cancel my subscription.
Yours concernedly, Dug.

"The Shenmue series needs to be loved by all people who love games. It is Yu Suzuki's love letter to videogames: to the joys of wandering, to the compulsion of twitch gaming"

Next month

The console online race has begun





MARCH 2003
£4.00
future games
The first choice for gamers
9 771350 159038
03
gamesradar.com